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ALICE GODOLPHIN.

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# ALICE GODOLPHIN

AND

## A LITTLE HEIRESS.

Two Stories.

BY

MARY NEVILLE.

*(Mary Tuffnell)*

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

Purpureus veluti cum flos succisus aratro  
Languescit moriens ; lassove papavera collo  
Demisere caput, pluviam cum fortè gravantur.

ÆNEID, BOOK IX.



London:

SAMUEL TINSLEY,

10, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND.

1875.

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## P R E F A C E.

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THESE short tales are dedicated to my dear eldest brother, in the hope that they may serve to pass away some of the many solitary hours he must spend at sea.

The indulgence of the Public is claimed for these volumes, on the plea of their being a first work, and written at an age when few have ventured to tamper with literature.

McLaughlin 25 Nov. 53

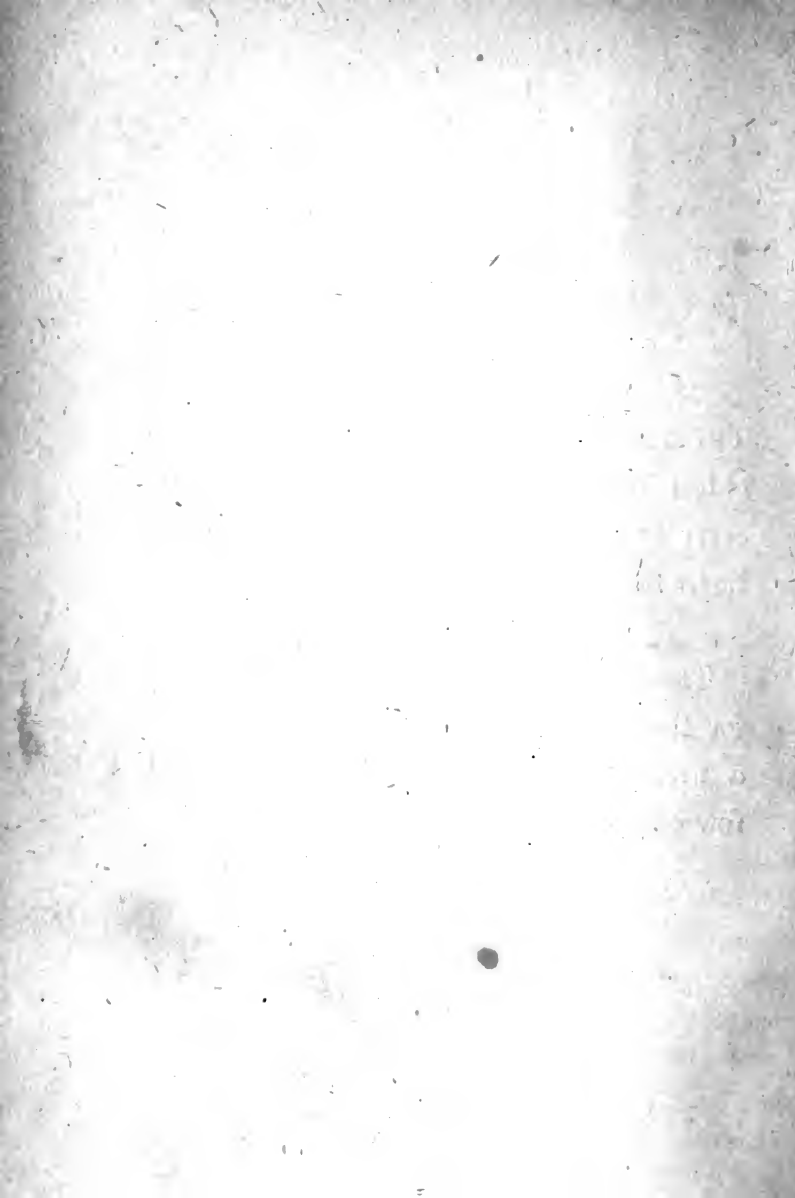
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# ALICE GODOLPHIN.

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## CHAPTER I.

Thou art not steeped in golden languors,

No tranced summer calm is thine,

Ever-varying Madeline.

Thro' light and shadow thou dost range,

Sudden glances, sweet and strange.

TENNYSON.

THE hot rays of a June sun were streaming into a steep little street in one of the smallest of our sea-port towns in Devonshire. Everything looked drooping and languid in the oppressive mid-day heat. Even the sea-birds seemed to fly heavily, and flapped their broad wings lazily in the sultry air, as though it were too much trouble to pursue their usual occupation of dipping lightly and luxuriously into one tiny wave after another. In the distant meadows the cattle had grouped themselves

under the shade of the beeches, or stood knee-deep in the cool river, chewing the cud in a trance of lazy enjoyment. The shopkeepers had half closed their small green shutters, and the whole town wore an air of dreamy repose, as if the inhabitants had unanimously resolved upon taking an afternoon siesta, which was, in fact, not far from the truth.

There was only one living creature in the prospect who seemed in no way affected by the excessive heat; this was a young lady of about nineteen, in a broad shady hat, who was walking quickly down the narrow street, with as light and elastic a step as if it were a frosty day in January, instead of an unusually hot day in one of the hottest months in the year. It was a very fair face that was so jealously concealed by the broad-brimmed hat, which hid all but the sweet mouth and fair hair which was drawn back from the delicate little ears, and gathered into a shining coil behind. Certainly no young lady could have been more unfashionably dressed; but it may be questioned whether one of the most elaborate toilettes of Mesdames Elise et Cie. could have set off the fresh young beauty more than the shady hat before men-



tioned, and the simple brown holland dress, which sat so neatly on the round young figure. A sharp turn at the end of the street brought her to a narrow little path, which led along the edge of a high cliff overlooking the sea.

A gentleman was standing at the corner of the street, and the young lady held out her hand in friendly greeting as he came in sight. He was evidently a clergyman by his dress, and his reddish hair and high cheek-bones, as well as a slight accent, betokened him to be a Scotchman. He spoke hurriedly, and with a slight nervousness of manner. "I am glad to have met you, Miss Alice. I had intended to call on you to-day. Will it be possible for you to take your class at the Sunday School half-an-hour earlier than usual in future? I wish to make a slight difference in the arrangements now the hot weather has fairly set in."

"The hot weather has set in for some time, Mr. Dalgetty," replied the young lady, smiling, as they walked on side by side; "but I will be at the school by half-past eight in future if you think it more desirable."

"Not on any account, if it is inconvenient to you," said the young clergyman, anxiously.

“It will not inconvenience me,” she replied.  
“Will you not come in and see Agnes?”

They had reached a pretty little house, which was built only a few hundred yards from the path on which they had been walking, and was approached by a small green gate which stood invitingly open.

“Thank you, no. I must not stay,” was the reply. “I have business at the other end of the parish. My compliments to Miss Godolphin.” He raised his hat, and was gone.

The young girl looked after him for a moment, and then walked slowly up the gravel path, and entered the house. She took up a letter which was lying on the hall table, addressed to Miss Alice Godolphin, Briarswood, Southport, and then, opening a door on the right, she entered the little sitting-room. It was a pleasant shady room, the chairs and sofa covered with a cool looking chintz, and a sweet smell pervading the atmosphere, which came from a bunch of white roses on the table. A young lady, of about five or six and twenty, was sitting at the writing-table by the window, the summer sunshine falling on her dark hair and fair tranquil face. She looked up with a pleasant smile as the

other entered, and held out a letter, saying,—  
“Here is some news for you, Alice. Who do you think is coming to pay us a visit next week?”

“I don’t know,” said the young lady addressed. “Miss Marjoribanks, or old Captain Forester again.” But, as she spoke, she took the letter, and, as her eyes fell on the elaborate purple and gold monogram on the envelope, her face lost its uninterested expression, and she exclaimed eagerly,—“Aunt Frances, surely *she* is not coming here? Why, Agnes, we have not room to take them in. And I see she means to bring Constance and Georgie with her.”

“We can manage it,” said Agnes, thoughtfully, “if Aunt Frances can do without a dressing-room. Here is the tea, Alice, will you make it, while I go and speak to papa?” And she left the room, while the younger sister placed herself at the tea-table, with a more thoughtful expression than ordinary on her fair face.

She looked very lovely as she sat there, a ray of sunlight which had strayed into the room just touching her golden hair, and lighting up the blue eyes and fair features

with a glory not their own. Is it really only a fanciful idea that those whose after lives will be overshadowed by some great calamity bear some prophetic intimation of their approaching doom in their faces? All the Stuarts were noted for this indefinable mournfulness of expression, and in the two most unfortunate members of that unhappy house, Charles the First and Mary Queen of Scots, it was particularly noticeable. Scarcely a cloud had as yet risen to mar the sunshine of Alice Godolphin's happy girlhood; her present was peaceful, her future bright and golden, as it ever is to sanguine youth; from whence then came the shadow which never quite left her face even in her gayest moments? We cannot tell, but it was certainly there, and seemed out of character with as buoyant and hopeful a nature as God ever created.

Agnes and Alice Godolphin were motherless girls. Their father, Mr. Godolphin, was a hopeless invalid, and had been confined to his room for many years. Their mother, Lady Mary, had died when her eldest child (Agnes) was only six years old, and Alice a mere baby. Mr. Godolphin had taught them him-

self for some years, and when his failing health rendered this no longer possible, their education was confided to an excellent governess, who had left about a year before the opening of my story. Agnes then assumed the care of her father's house, and ruled it with a gentleness and prudence far beyond her years. It was no easy matter to keep up the comforts of even that small household on the very limited sum which her father allowed her for housekeeping. At one time Mr. Godolphin had been a wealthy man, but since the death of his wife he had had many serious losses, and, with the perverse weakness which often accompanies failing health, had persisted in fancying himself even poorer than he really was. He would frequently decline to sign a cheque for necessary expenses when it was really quite possible and convenient for him to do so, while, at the same time, he would order some useless piece of furniture for the already overcrowded house, leaving Agnes with scarcely five shillings in her pocket.

But in spite of these little rubs, the girls led a very happy life. Like the good, true-hearted girls they were, they thought of their father as

he *used* to be, and loved him for what he had been to them in the days when disease and care had not soured his temper and warped his once powerful intellect. On the present occasion, Mr. Godolphin happened to be in a good humour, and received the startling news of his sister-in-law's intended arrival with surprising equanimity.

"You must make Lady Frances as comfortable as you can, my dear," he said. "You can tell Jones to take down the pony-chaise to meet them. She won't get her London dinners here; but that can't be helped. Now draw up the blinds, and tell Alice to send me a cup of tea."

Agnes did as she was bid, and went down with much thankfulness to tell her sister of her successful interview. She had scarcely reached the drawing-room door, when a loud peal at the bell announced a visitor, and in another moment a tall, elderly lady entered the room, and greeted the sisters with affection.

"It seems an age since we saw you, dear Miss Fairfax," said Agnes. "I suppose you have been as busy as usual?"

“There is always plenty to be done in this world, my dear,” said the lady, with a sharpness of tone strangely at variance with her bright, contented-looking face. “I have no patience with some young ladies, who tell me they have nothing to do, and no object in life. Pray, Miss Alice, how many sick people have *you* visited this week? there’s a deal of illness in the town. Not one, I dare say.”

“She does more than you give her credit for, Miss Fairfax,” put in Agnes, kindly. “It is so much easier to work under Mr. Dalgetty than under Mr. Cross. He takes more interest in little things, and we are not afraid to ask him for advice.”

Miss Fairfax did not answer. Her eyes were fixed on Alice, who had left the tea-table, and was standing by the window, looking out on the still grey sea, over which the shades of twilight were beginning to deepen. At the sound of her sister’s voice she turned round, and said, gaily,—“This place will be a little more lively next week, Miss Fairfax. I fear the sick people will be rather neglected by us. Aunt Frances is coming to pay us a visit, and

she brings two daughters with her, a maid, and a King Charles."

"Bless my soul," exclaimed Miss Fairfax, startled out of her grim propriety of behaviour. "What on earth brings her Ladyship down here at this time of year? It's the height of the London season."

"Constance has overworked herself a little," answered Alice, "and Aunt Frances thinks a few days of our fresh sea air will do her good. And you know it is seven years since we have seen her."

"So her Ladyship means to accomplish the double object of seeing her dear nieces and saving a week's rent at an hotel," snapped Miss Fairfax, in reply.

"You never liked Aunt Frances," said Alice, with a slight tone of resentment in her voice. "She used to be so kind when we were children and lived near London, and dear mamma loved her dearly."

"She loved her, my dear, because she was her sister," was the grim reply; "and your dear mother was not one likely to fail in natural affection. But as for any real union of thought and feeling between them, the



North and South Poles were not more opposite. Your mother was gentle, kind, and unworldly; Lady Frances was— Well, I ought not to prejudice you against her. Agnes, how is your father?"

"Pretty well to-day, thank you. Would you like to see him?"

"Not to-day; I have not a moment to spare. Alice, give me that parcel. I am due at the other end of the town." And Miss Fairfax hurried to the door, but turned round before she had reached it, and fixed her penetrating grey eyes on Alice. "I suppose you are hoping that Lady Frances will give you a season in town, young lady?" said she, abruptly.

Alice flushed crimson. The idea had evidently occurred to her, but she answered hastily,— "Oh, no; it is not likely. She never asked Agnes, and I could not go alone."

"If she asks you, don't go," said Miss Fairfax, still in full retreat to the hall door. "You are too young to go gadding about with no better chaperone than her Ladyship. Good-bye."

The door slammed, and the sisters were

again left alone. Agnes sat down to her writing, and Alice moved about the room, watering the plants in the window, and humming a cheerful air to herself. Hers was evidently a restless nature ; she did not remain still a moment ; and at last flitted through the open window, exclaiming,—“Do put on your hat, Agnes, and come out. It is such a glorious evening, and quite cool.”

Agnes raised her head, and said, doubtfully, —“I shall have to finish these accounts this evening if I come out now. It *does* look lovely. What a sunset !”

“I will fetch your things,” said Alice,—and, flying through the hall and up the narrow staircase, she soon re-appeared with a large straw hat and a light shawl, which she threw over her sister’s shoulders. Agnes could resist no longer, and the two sisters left the house together, and descended by a narrow path to the beach below. It was pleasant walking on the smooth, brown sand, with that glorious prospect of sea and sky before them, and the sisters paced up and down for more than an hour, their arms closely entwined, talking in the low confidential tone that girls love. No

warning voice sounded in their ears to tell this was the last of those peaceful evening walks that had been such a source of happy, innocent enjoyment to them both.

They sauntered quietly on, as they had done a hundred times before, all unconscious of the dark future that lay before one of them, which each happy moment was bringing nearer. The sun slowly sank, bright and glorious to the last, and before the sisters turned to go home twilight had deepened into night, and all Nature was soothed to sleep with the ceaseless hush, hush of the waves.

## CHAPTER II.

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,  
The bridal of the earth and sky.

HERBERT.

THE next day was Sunday. It dawned bright and beautiful over the little town of Southport; the heat had somewhat abated, and everything looked fresh and lovely in the early morning. The Misses Godolphin were up betimes, one to read to her father, and the other that she might be in good time for her early class at the Sunday School. However, at the last moment Mr. Godolphin said he had a headache, and would prefer being left alone; so Agnes and Alice started together for the school, instead of one remaining behind, as was usually their custom. Their road led them away from the sea, through the beautiful meadows which skirted the town, knee-deep in grass, and still wet with the early dew. As they walked

along Agnes drew a letter from her pocket, which had come by that morning's post.

"This is from Aunt Frances," she said; "shall I read it to you?"

"Do," said Alice; and Agnes read aloud:—

"106, Lowndes Street.

"MY DEAR AGNES,—It has just occurred to me that you would like to know at what hour to expect us on Tuesday next."

"She takes it for granted that we can receive her," said Alice.

"Of course she does," said Agnes; and read on:—

"We shall hope to be with you quite by four o'clock. I remember that your house is rather small, so I shall not expect a sitting-room for myself."

"We could not give it her if she did expect it," put in Alice.

Agnes smiled, and went on reading:—

"Is that extraordinary Miss Fairfax still alive, who used to be such a friend of your dear mother's? What sort of a clergyman have you now? Lord Braughton tells me he has appointed a Scotchman to the living of South-

port. I am sorry for that, as the Scotch are usually dry and disagreeable, with presuming manners, red hair, and no private income. However, we shall only be able to be with you one Sunday. I suppose you have not heard of dear Conny's engagement to Lord Braughton? It has given the greatest satisfaction to her father and myself. Lord Braughton is all that the most anxious parent could desire for a son-in-law. I will tell you all particulars when we meet. Alice must be grown quite a young lady by this time. She was a pretty child in curls and pinafores when I last saw her.

“ ‘ My love to her and yourself,

“ ‘ Your affectionate Aunt,

“ ‘ FRANCES E. LASCELLES.

“ ‘ P.S.—Pray see yourself that the beds are well aired.’ ”

“ How pleased she seems to be about Conny,” said Alice; “ is she very pretty, Agnes?”

“ She is like Aunt Frances,” was the reply. “ The same delicate features, but without her bright expression. I used to think Conny's face too hard and cold for real beauty, but I believe she is immensely admired.”

The two walked on for some time in silence. There was a tone in Lady Frances's letter which did not quite harmonize with the calm beauty of the still Sabbath morning, nor with their own peaceful, quiet thoughts.

Suddenly Agnes exclaimed, — "I hear the church clock striking the quarter; we shall be late for prayers. Let us take the short cut, Alice, dear."

The shortest cut is said to prove invariably the longest in the end; and so it happened on the present occasion. Agnes had only taken a few steps on the steep little path which led up to the school-house, when she trod accidentally on a loose stone, and fell heavily to the ground. Alice was kneeling by her side in a moment.

"Have you hurt yourself, dear?" she said, anxiously. "How did you manage to fall?"

"I don't know; my foot slipped," said Agnes, with a face white as death. "It hurts terribly, Alice; I can't move. What shall we do?"

"Can I be of any assistance to you?" said a kindly voice behind,—and Alice looked up

eagerly, to see the tall form of the young Scotch clergyman standing by them.

“ Oh, thank you, Mr. Dalgetty ; would you mind walking on to the town,—it is not three minutes from here,—and tell Carter to send one of his flies here at once to take Agnes home ? She has sprained her ankle, and can’t move.”

She had scarcely finished speaking, when Mr. Dalgetty strode off as fast as his long legs could carry him, and returned in an incredibly short space of time with a fly, into which he had hastily thrown a few soft cushions, procured from his own lodging, and on which he carefully placed the poor wounded foot.

Agnes was not one readily to give way to pain of any kind, and when she was comfortably settled in the fly, she insisted that Alice should go on to the school. “ I shall do very well now, darling,” said she. “ Markham will take care of me when I get home, and the faintness has quite gone off. No, I won’t have you return with me ; your class will miss you.” And she drove off, leaving Alice and Mr. Dalgetty to hurry on to the school, which they reached just at the half hour.



It was a pretty sight to see Alice in the midst of her Sunday School class. The children all loved her, and never a Sunday was allowed to pass without sundry offerings being presented to her of tiny nosegays, gathered from their own cottage gardens. Alice was far too good-natured not to *seem* to appreciate these gifts, though it may be questioned if she would not gladly have dispensed with the innumerable little bunches of sweet-briar and small flabby rose-buds, which the little girls presented with such glee.

Was it a great wonder if the young clergyman's eyes occasionally strayed to where that slight young figure stood in the midst of her class—the sweet face, with its crown of golden hair, looking (he used fancifully to think) like some ministering angel sent down to teach the ignorant and poor?

The sun was now rising high in the heavens, and the Gothic-shaped windows of the little school-room were thrown wide open to admit the sweet summer air; but it was very hot; and Alice looked pale and tired as she dismissed her class, and prepared to walk home. Mr. Dalgetty joined her before she had gone many

steps, saying,—“I will walk to Briarswood with you, Miss Alice, if you will allow me. I should like to know how Miss Godolphin is, and I have a few minutes to spare before church.”

She made no objection, and they walked on, side by side, down the steep little path, and out into the sunny meadows again.

Poor Mr. Dalgetty, he was much to be pitied ! He had scarcely been two months in the parish, but during that time he had learnt to love the fair girl who walked beside him with a force and intensity only known to these reserved yet passionate natures. We would not say a word in disparagement of clever, strong-minded women : they are most useful in their generation, and are doing a noble, unselfish work in our day ; but, ah ! they little know how a man’s heart clings to the gentle loving girl, who shows him so plainly by every confiding word and look that she can no more stand without his support than the ivy could flourish if the strong tree to which it clings so closely were suddenly and roughly cast down.

Mr. Dalgetty never imagined for one moment that his love could be returned,—he was all too

painfully conscious of his inferiority to most men in appearance and address; and in his deep humility of soul he never cast a thought to the noble purity of heart and life which might well have induced some girls to overlook these disadvantages. All his eggs were in that one basket; and he looked for nothing better than to see it some day dashed to the ground, and all his dearest heart-treasures broken and scattered for ever.

It is said that love cannot exist without hope; but surely this is not true? Why, if so, do we ever hear of men (and women) loving passionately, unselfishly, devotedly, long after it has been proved beyond all rational doubt that the object so loved is unworthy, cold, and *faithless*?

You will say that it must be a noble nature that will love thus generously to the end. True; but such natures are not so rare as we think. Mr. Dalgetty was not an agreeable companion—men *very much* in love seldom are; and Alice occasionally cast an impatient glance at him, thinking how much pleasanter it would have been to have had Agnes for a companion, instead of this grave silent man, who did not

seem to think it worth while to try and talk to her.

At last the silence became embarrassing, and Alice spoke. "I hope Agnes will soon be all right again. My aunt, Lady Frances Lascelles, is coming to us on Tuesday, and it would be very unlucky if she was laid up."

"A sprain is usually a tedious affair," was the discouraging reply. "It may be some weeks before Miss Godolphin is able to walk with ease and safety. Will Lady Frances remain long with you?"

"Only a week or so; but," and Alice looked up with a smile, "I think it is *just* possible that she might ask us to return with her to town for a short time. I have never seen London, and Agnes would enjoy the pictures and all the exhibitions so much."

The grave face beside her grew a trifle paler, but he said quietly,—“It would be very pleasant for you, no doubt. You would be in no hurry to return to Briarswood, Miss Alice.”

“Oh, I could not stay long. Agnes would never leave papa for more than a few weeks; though, as for that, I think he is just as happy when Miss Marjoribanks is here and we are

away. He says it is a pleasant change for him."

"Ah, they are old friends, I suppose?" said Mr. Dalgetty, absently. "Here is Briarswood. Will you bring me word how Miss Godolphin is? I will wait here."

He could not be induced to enter the house, but stood leaning against the little green gate till Alice returned with her report. Agnes was not in much pain, but her ankle was a good deal swollen, and there was no chance of her getting to church. Having received his answer, Mr. Dalgetty hastened back to church, and arrived just as the bells had done ringing—an event which much surprised the good people of Southport, who were not used to seeing their imperturbable minister arrive so late, with a flushed face, and his general aspect betokening haste and nervousness.

Meanwhile, Alice was sitting by her sister's sofa, tenderly bathing the poor swollen foot. The doctor had been, and pronounced it to be a slight sprain, which would only necessitate perfect rest for two or three days. Agnes was not very strong, and the excitement and pain had tried her a good deal. She lay, with a hot,

flushed face, on the little sofa which was drawn to the window, while Alice read to her short passages from their favourite authors, George Herbert and Keble. After a time, she laid down the book, and said,—“What a large party we shall have here next Tuesday, Agnes.”

“I am rather sorry for it,” was the answer. We are so quiet and happy now. I can’t tell why, but I have a presentiment that Aunt Frances’s visit will bring us no happiness.”

“I don’t think I shall care much for Constance,” said Alice, “but I think Georgie must be very bright and amusing. She is very pretty, is she not?”

“Yes, in a different style; she is very dark. Alice, I think I hear papa calling. Will you go and see what he wants?”

Alice ran quickly upstairs, and found Mr. Godolphin in a state of considerable nervous excitement. He had been told of Agnes’s accident, and could not be satisfied that she was not seriously hurt till Alice repeated the doctor’s opinion to him, when he veered round, and said that it was very careless; Agnes ought to know better than to go tumbling

about like an overgrown baby. It was impossible to pacify him till Alice offered to finish reading a book to him in which he was much interested; and in the joys and sorrows of 'Naomi' he forgot his own, and in process of time fell fast asleep.

In the course of the long summer afternoon, Miss Fairfax called, having heard of the accident from Mr. Dalgetty. She bustled into the room with her usual unceremonious manner, and seated herself at the edge of Agnes's sofa, taking great care, however, not to shake the sprained foot, which was supported by several soft cushions. "Well, this is a clever thing for you to do, young woman," said she. "Just as your aunt is expected too. Alice, run and fetch me a wet sponge. Don't you know a sprained foot should always be kept damp?"

"The swelling has gone down so much, Miss Fairfax, I think I shall be able to walk by Tuesday."

"You won't walk for a month, unless you attend to what I tell you. This foot is as hot as fire. Now, Miss Alice, will you take yourself off into the garden, or upstairs to your father, or anywhere else in the wide world

that may occur to you. I want to talk to Agnes alone."

Alice disappeared through the open window, nothing loth, and Miss Fairfax turned to Agnes, and spoke earnestly. "Now, I am not going to worry you, my dear, for I see you look tired; but there are just a few words I want to say about this visit of your aunt's. I shan't be easy till I have had it out with you. Has it occurred to you that her Ladyship has another motive in coming here besides saving a long bill at an hotel in Brighton or Scarborough?"

"I imagine she comes to see my father."

"Nonsense. If she had cared two pins about your father, she would not have let all these years pass by without coming to see him. I remember Lady Frances's visit seven years ago. I thought over all the particulars last night. She came then to see *you*, and finding you what you are, a quiet, nice-looking, sensible girl, no beauty (I always speak plainly, my dear), she decided to leave you here under your father's care, and resigned all thought of adopting you."

"Of adopting me, dear Miss Fairfax? She could never have thought—"



“I tell you, my dear, she would have taken you away, and brought you up as her own daughter, if you had been what Alice is now.”

Agnes’s glance wandered to the window, and rested lovingly on her sister, who was engaged in tying up a drooping carnation, her face slightly flushed with the heat, her golden hair hanging loosely beneath her shady hat. A fair picture truly; and Agnes’s soft eyes filled with tears as she said, almost sobbing,—“I have no authority, and papa can be persuaded to anything. Oh, Miss Fairfax, *how* you have made me dread Aunt Frances’s visit!”

“There, there, my dear, don’t worry before the time. Remember there’s a Providence in all these things. I shall wish I had said nothing if you take it so to heart. But I may not have another opportunity of speaking, so you must quietly listen for a moment. Rely upon it, Alice is not fit to battle with the world with no better guardian than my Lady Frances. She has not half the sense at nineteen that you had at fifteen. Let no one talk you over with nonsense about the advantages of good intro-

ductions, and society, and all that. I have gone through it all, my dear, in my time, and I know it to be unprofitable, nay, mischievous, if you have not the strength of character to resist strong temptation. Now I must go, or I shall be late for evening church. Don't let that child stay out without a shawl, the dews are falling. Good-bye,"—and she was gone.

With a sudden impulse Agnes raised herself on her cushions, and called to her sister. Alice came to the window, stood there a moment in surprise, then sprang in, and threw herself on the ground by the little sofa. "What is it, darling? You have been crying; is your foot so painful?"

"No, no, it is not that. Tell me, Alice; you would never leave me of your own free will, would you?"

"What do you mean, Agnes? How could I?"

"Listen, dear. Miss Fairfax thinks it possible that Aunt Frances may wish to take you back to London with her. Would you consent to go without me?"

The answer did not come immediately, and

Agnes bent down and looked anxiously into the fair face.

“If it was only for a short time. Agnes, you know how I have longed to see London. I could not stay *long* away from you; but for a fortnight, perhaps, or a month. You are not angry?”

“No, dear,”—and Agnes said no more, but lay very still, so still, that Alice thought she slept, and the gathering twilight prevented her seeing the tears that were raining down the pale, sweet face.

Mean time Miss Fairfax was hurrying along the path by the cliff leading to the church, and presently encountered Mr. Dalgetty, who stopped to inquire how she had left Miss Godolphin.

“Pretty well, thank you; a good deal shaken. There’s not very much amiss with her foot that I can see. Did I not see you this morning, Mr. Dalgetty, walking back from the school with Alice Godolphin?”

The abrupt question brought the blood into the young clergyman’s face as he answered in the affirmative.

Miss Fairfax shot a keen glance at him, and

then spoke rapidly, imperatively, as was her wont when somewhat excited. "Mr. Dalgetty, I knew your mother well in old days, and have nursed you on my knee when you were a tiny boy in petticoats. I am going to speak plainly to you, with the freedom of an old friend. You are drawing near the edge of a dangerous precipice, take care you don't fall over."

"I do not quite understand you."

"You are falling in love with Alice Godolphin. *Now* do you understand me?"

Poor Mr. Dalgetty! how his cheeks burned and his heart beat; but he answered with gentle dignity,—“I will not deny that you have spoken the truth, Miss Fairfax. But you need not fear me. I am fully sensible of my own utter unworthiness.”

“Mercy on me, that is not what I mean!” almost shouted Miss Fairfax. And she came suddenly to a stand-still, planted her umbrella firmly in the ground, and turned sharply round, face to face with her amazed companion. “*Your* unworthiness, indeed! No, I am warning you against having anything to do with Alice Godolphin (as a wife) because she is

utterly unworthy of *you*. Now don't interrupt me; I know all you would say. I know she is amiable, truthful, and unselfish, and has many other good qualities. But she has a fault which will over-ride all these in time—she is essentially weak-minded. She leads a quiet, useful life here, because she is living with quiet, useful people. When her fine worldly aunt gets an influence over her, she will grow fine and worldly too. She has no more stability of character than that weed,”—and Miss Fairfax gave a contemptuous shove with her umbrella to a tiny thistle which grew on the edge of the cliff, sending the downy particles floating in all directions on the soft summer breeze.

Mr. Dalgetty almost trembled with anger, but outwardly his face was calm and impassive as ever. “Perhaps we had better not discuss this subject again, Miss Fairfax; it is not one on which we are likely to agree. Will you excuse me if I hurry on? I have been late already once to-day.”

He walked quickly on, and Miss Fairfax gazed after him with a peculiar expression, half-contemptuous, half-mournful. “Poor young man,” she murmured, “he is harder hit than I

thought! If it had only been Agnes. But with all his good sense, he is no more proof against the enchantment of a pretty face than any other man I ever met, or am ever likely to meet. Young and old, good and bad, wise and foolish, they are all alike—all alike.”

And she, too, hurried on to church with a heavy heart.

## CHAPTER III.

I know a maiden fair to see,  
Take care !  
She can both false and friendly be,  
Beware ! Beware !

“Put down that book, Constance ; it is so bad for your eyes to read in the train.”

The speaker was Lady Frances Lascelles, a tall, distinguished-looking person, of about forty-five, with regular, handsome features, and a chestnut-coloured front, so artistically arranged as to deceive many a practised eye. She was leaning back in a corner of the railway carriage on the afternoon of that eventful Tuesday which was to convey her and her family to Southport.

Opposite her Ladyship sat her eldest daughter, the young lady addressed. She was a tall, pale girl, of about three-and-twenty, with a clear complexion, delicate features, and dark,

wavy hair, worn very low on her forehead. A handsome face certainly, though an occasional shifty look in the dark grey eyes would have gone far to mar its beauty in the opinion of some people, as betokening a certain untrustworthiness of disposition. Very different was her younger sister, Georgina, who was sitting at the farther end of the carriage, deeply engaged in the study of *Punch*. She could not have been more than seventeen, and her face was a pleasant one to look at, with its pretty though irregular features, and bright blue eyes. Constance had laid down her book after her mother's remark, and sat looking out of the window, her head leaning on her small gloved hand.

"You look pale, my dear," said Lady Frances. "Does your head ache?"

"It aches at the thought of having to come down to this horrible place, where I know we shall all be bored to death. I cannot conceive, mamma, why you could not have let me remain at home."

"Well, my dear, you see I had made your health my principal excuse for coming to pay your uncle a visit just now, so it would have



looked rather inconsistent to have left you behind."

"Did you say that Conny had been ill, mamma?" laughed Georgina, as she threw down her paper, and came to seat herself by her sister.

"I hinted something of the kind," said Lady Frances, languidly surveying the exquisite fit of her pale lavender gloves. "My dear Georgie, what a figure you have made of yourself, lounging in that way. Your bonnet is all awry, and your hair!—"

"Never mind, mamma; we are going among the aborigines, you know, and they will think it is the latest fashion."

"I suppose we shall find those girls clad in brown hollands and cotton gloves," was Constance's next observation.

"Very likely," was her mother's reply. "I could not, I really could *not* reconcile it to my conscience to leave Alice there any longer. Mrs. John Bartram, who was staying at Southport last winter, informed me that she is a most lovely girl. I feel it to be my duty to take charge of her for a time, though I expect to be bored to death with three girls to

take about." And her Ladyship assumed an air of virtuous self-abnegation.

"You will only have me for one more season, mamma," said Constance, with a smile.

"True, my dear; and though I cannot but grieve at the prospect of losing you so soon, at the same time I cannot but rejoice" (here her Ladyship became somewhat hazy in her expressions) "at the prospect of your—your—happiness, and the excellent settlement you are about to make."

Constance drew herself up, and looked in every respect the model of a young lady who is about to make an "excellent settlement."

"I could even wish," continued her mother, "that Lord Braughton had not been compelled to go abroad for these two months. It is singularly unfortunate. I do so dislike long engagements."

"He *did* look very delicate," said Georgina. "I suppose you will not go out much this season, Conny, as he will be away?"

"I shall make no difference," was the sharp reply.

And Lady Frances spoke reprovingly. "My dear Georgina, you are inconsiderate. I

should not wish your sister to mope on any account. She must keep up her spirits, and, besides, it is always well to be on the safe side, and not lose acquaintances. Lord Braughton *did* look a good deal broken in health, and one can never tell how things may turn out in this uncertain world."

After which oracular speech, her Ladyship leant back, closed her eyes, and spoke no more till they reached the little station of Southport, where Mr. Godolphin's little pony-chaise was waiting to meet them.

"What an extraordinary vehicle," exclaimed Lady Frances. "Is it possible that it can be intended for us?"

"Miss Godolphin's compliments, my lady," said the obsequious Jones, touching his hat; "she hoped you would drive down with one of the young ladies in the trap, and one of Carter's flies is waiting for the other young lady and the luggage."

Constance turned up her eyes with an expression of despair, Georgina burst out laughing, and Lady Frances exclaimed in dismay,—  
"But, my good man, that wretched little animal can never take us all the way to Briars-

wood. It is quite two miles from the station, if I remember rightly."

"The pony is very strong, my Lady; he could draw the trap twice as far," was Jones's somewhat indignant reply. And seeing there was no help for it, her Ladyship got into the tiny conveyance, her voluminous skirts nearly filling up the whole space, followed by Constance, who was secretly muttering anathemas against her uncle's "extraordinary conduct" in not having provided a suitable carriage to meet them. Georgina and Parkins, the maid, followed in a fly with the luggage, greatly to the latter's disgust, who found herself compelled to carry three band-boxes in her lap.

They all arrived about the same time opposite the little green gate which has so often been alluded to, and here they found Alice waiting to receive them, for Agnes was not yet able to leave her sofa.

Lady Frances greeted her with an affectionate embrace. "My dear child, is it possible this can be the little Alice I remember so well? I should never have recognized you. Here are Constance and Georgie; I suppose you have no recollection of each other?"

And they all entered the house together, and were warmly greeted by Agnes, who was still looking pale and ill from the effects of her accident. Lady Frances sat down by her side, full of regrets and sympathy, while Constance, who had quite laid aside her listless, discontented manner, talked kindly to Alice, who was rather shy, admiring the beautiful view from the windows, &c. It would have been a curious study of character if one could have read the innermost thoughts of the three new arrivals, all apparently so happy and friendly. Lady Frances's were something after this fashion: "I am agreeably disappointed. Both girls are quiet and lady-like, and there is no pretension in their dress or in the furniture of the room." (Her Ladyship was a woman of the world, and knew that the outward appearance of a room is generally a pretty fair index of the character of its owners.) "A little more style is wanting, of course, but on the whole it is far better than I expected."

Constance was saying to herself, "What a bore it is having to talk to this goose of a girl; she does not seem to have two ideas in her head! I shan't take the trouble to do it

after to-day." And Georgina was thinking, "What a lovely face Alice has. I never saw such bright golden hair. She must put something on it—I wonder what it is. Of course she would not divulge the secret for the world. And what a kind, sensible face Agnes has! I am sure I shall love them both."

After a few minutes, tea was brought in, and then Lady Frances rose, and proposed going to see Mr. Godolphin. "After which, my dear Agnes," she said, "I shall go to my room and lie down till dinner-time. I feel a little exhausted with the heat." And she swept out of the room, preceded by Alice, who ran on to show the way, and prepare her father for the visit.

"My dear Henry, what a a joy to meet again!" exclaimed Lady Frances, advancing with outstretched hands.

"I am surprised you think it a *joy* to see any one so broken down in health as I am," grumbled Mr. Godolphin, who happened, unfortunately, to be in one of his worst humours. "How do you do, Fanny? You don't look a day older, of course. All my friends seem to have got the secret of perpetual youth and

health—out of aggravation to me, I suppose.”

“But, my dear Henry, you must not take too gloomy a view of your own health,” smiled her Ladyship, highly gratified by the compliment to her appearance. “You are not looking the least ill, I assure you.”

“I dare say you think it’s all fancy,” growled Mr. Godolphin, whom nothing irritated so much as to throw a doubt on his serious state of health.

“Fancy! oh no, dear Henry; but invalids are sometimes a little apt to imagine—”

“Ah, that’s it, of course; no doubt you think it’s all imagination.”

How intolerable he is, thought Lady Frances; but she only said, sweetly,—“I see you are tired, dear Henry, so I will not remain longer just now. Perhaps you will feel more inclined for a chat after dinner.”

This was worse than all, for it was tantamount to saying he was in a bad temper, and Mr. Godolphin exclaimed, impatiently,—“Don’t talk nonsense, Frances; I am not in the least tired. Sit down, and tell me what you think of the girls.”

“Dear Agnes seems as good and sweet as ever,” replied Lady Frances, gracefully resuming her seat; “and Alice is quite lovely. My dear Henry, you have a treasure in that girl.”

“A treasure no one is likely to appreciate down here.”

“Ah, that is a subject I wished to urge upon you, dear Henry,”—and her Ladyship bent forward and spoke earnestly. “You must really allow me to take that girl back to town with me, if only for one season. She will make a sensation. That *spirituelle* kind of beauty is so very uncommon, I could safely predict that she would shortly make a brilliant alliance, suitable for one of your ancient family and good connexions.”

This last was a clever thrust: Lady Frances knew that one of Mr. Godolphin’s weakest points lay in the antiquity of his family. The invalid seemed to be debating with himself, and when he spoke, it was in a hesitating tone. “You would take Agnes too, I suppose; you can’t separate the sisters?”

“Ah, I wish I could offer a room to dear Agnes as well; but it is out of the question.



We shall be crowded as it is. Besides, dear Henry, I really do not think you ought to be deprived of both your daughters at once, in your precarious state of health."

"As to that, my old friend, Miss Marjoribanks, stays here often by the month together, and she could look after me. Well, I have no objection to your taking Alice, only don't keep her too long; and mind I am not bothered about money for London outfits, and all that."

With which ungracious permission her Ladyship was more than satisfied; and having exacted a promise of secrecy from "dear Henry" on the plea that the girl must be better acquainted with her cousins before making up her mind to return with them, she gladly ended the interview, and retired to her own room.

The evening passed off pleasantly. Georgina was gifted with a very beautiful contralto voice, and delighted her cousins with one song after another, till the clock struck eleven, and they all retired to rest. Constance followed her mother to her room, and seated herself in a comfortable arm-chair, while Lady Frances was divested of her heavy silk dress, and put on

a pale blue cashmere dressing-gown, extremely comfortable and becoming. She then laid herself on the sofa, and observed languidly to her daughter,—“I don’t think I shall remain here beyond Monday, dear child. I feel so unwell to-night,—quite overcome.”

“Do you find the house less comfortable than you expected, mamma?” asked Constance, who understood her mother pretty well.

“No, I will not say that. On the contrary, Agnes manages better than I expected; but there is no reason now why I should prolong my stay: the purpose for which I came is already accomplished.”

“About Alice?”

“Yes, it is all settled; your uncle has given his consent to her returning with us, only do not mention it just yet to Agnes. I have an idea that she will raise difficulties. I forgot to tell you of the interview I had with your uncle. He was rather more uncivil than he used to be, and never even took the trouble to inquire after Sir Hugh. By-the-bye, Constance, I am much pleased with the way you talked to Alice this evening; you seemed on quite intimate terms.”

"I don't know what you mean by intimate terms, mamma!" and the haughty lip curled scornfully. "I paid the child a good deal of attention, as you wished me to do so. She seems a good little thing; not much will of her own, I should fancy, and easily led."

"What a mercy," murmured her Ladyship. "A strong-minded, self-willed girl is my pet aversion. She is very lovely, Constance."

"Do you think so? It is almost impossible to judge of a girl so atrociously dressed, and with her hair done in that school-girl fashion."

"I heard you praising her coiffure to-night," remarked Lady Frances, with a sleepy smile.

"Oh, of course, one must be civil, -and I was at my wit's end for something to say. I see you are tired, mamma; good-night." And the young lady retired to her own room, where she found Parkins in a high state of indignation at having to stay a week in a house where there was "no separate table for the hupper servants, and not even an 'ousekeeper's room." Meanwhile, a very different conversation was going on in Agnes's room, where Alice was engaged in bathing the injured foot, still much swollen and discoloured.

"I can't tell you how pleased I am with 'Constance,'" she said, looking up in her sister's face. "You had prepared me for something so different, Agnes. I think her manner is delightful; no pride or coldness about her."

Agnes smiled. "I still recommend you to make Georgie your chief friend, dear, though Constance is certainly fascinating. She strikes me as being more *true*."

"You do not think Constance insincere?"

"I am not quite so sure of her, but I do feel as if one might trust Georgie. I must not keep you up any longer, dear Alice; my foot feels quite cool and comfortable now."

"One word, Agnes; is not Aunt Frances handsome? I think she must look like Mary Queen of Scots when she grew older, with her large, blue eyes and gracious yet proud manner, just like a queen. And Constance and Georgie are like one's ideas of Mary Hamilton and Mary Seton. I think they are all *lovely*; good-night, Agnes."

From this conversation it may be inferred that one, at least, of the party found every reason to be satisfied with her newly-found relatives.

The next day was Wednesday, church and school day, and Alice came down to breakfast, hat in hand, looking as cool and fresh as a daisy, in her white dress and pink ribbons.

"Where are you going so early, Alice?" asked Georgina.

"I must be at the school by nine o'clock to-day, so I brought down my hat, that I might start directly after breakfast, and I shall go on to church afterwards."

"Unattended?" asked Lady Frances.

"Oh, yes; I always walk there alone."

"Indeed?" And her Ladyship's eyes grew suspicious.

"Unless Mr. Dalgetty joins me, which he often does, at the end of the Church Road, and we walk up to the school together."

"Ah, Mr. Dalgetty is the new rector, I presume? I think, Agnes" (and Lady Frances turned to her eldest niece, and spoke in a displeased tone), "I think it would be more fitting at Alice's age if she were *not* allowed to roam about the country with no better protector than this young clergyman."

"Dear aunt, I have no one to send."

"I should have thought Markham might well have gone with Alice."

"She cannot be spared in the early morning, and papa has never made any objection to Alice's walking alone to the school. It is such a short way."

"Indeed, then I can say no more,"—and Lady Frances leant back in her chair with an air of cold displeasure, and did not vouchsafe another remark during breakfast.

About an hour afterwards, Georgina, who was sitting by the open window, looked up at the sound of footsteps on the gravel path, and exclaimed, in a tone of great amusement,—  
"Oh, Constance, do come here, did you ever see such an extraordinary figure?" It was Miss Fairfax, dressed certainly with less regard to fashion than to the heat of the weather and her own convenience. She wore a very large straw hat, tied under the chin with a broad green ribbon, and a loose chintz garment, something like what our ancestors termed a bed-gown, which was confined at the waist with a white linen girdle. A large green sunshade and white cotton gloves completed this eccentric attire.

She did not take the trouble to ring, but entered the room by the open window, and having kissed Agnes, advanced towards Lady Frances, saying,—“I knew your sister very well, madam, but you have probably forgotten my existence. My name is Margaret Fairfax.”

“To be sure, I remember you perfectly,” and Lady Frances shook hands with cordiality.

“That is not likely, madam, for I only saw you once in my life, and then only for a few minutes.”

Lady Frances coloured slightly, but answered in a courteous tone, which had perhaps a dash of sarcasm,—“There are some persons whom, once seen, it is not easy to forget. Allow me to introduce my daughters.”

Georgina came forward and shook hands; Constance bowed, but did not leave her comfortable seat on the sofa. Miss Fairfax, however, walked straight up to her and said,—“I hear you are shortly to be married, young lady. I beg to congratulate you. I hope you have made a wise choice.”

“Thank you,” and another frigid bow, but not a word more did Constance vouchsafe. Miss Fairfax glanced sharply at her, and

turned away to speak to Georgina, whose blue eyes were dancing with merriment. Agnes felt greatly relieved when, after a long visit, she took leave without any serious *contre-temps* having taken place.

Soon after, Alice returned, and went for a long walk with Constance, a step which greatly surprised her mother, as that young lady was never known to walk half-a-dozen yards in London unless driven to it by stern necessity.

The two girls walked down to the sands, and sat in a shady spot under the cliff, about two miles from home, the tiny waves breaking close to their feet with a cool, pleasant sound. Constance had been describing some of the glories of a London season to her cousin, who listened with a beating heart and rapt wondering eyes. At last she said, with a sigh,—“You ought to be a happy girl, Constance; think what life is to us down here—no change, no excitement, scarcely any pleasure.” (Oh, Alice, and three days ago you would not have exchanged your peaceful lot for the most brilliant destiny on earth.)

Constance leant forward and spoke a few



words in her ear, which brought the crimson colour to Alice's cheek, as she exclaimed,—“Is it true? Am I really to go? Has papa given his consent?”

“It is quite true. How I envy you your first season in town, Alice. Everything will be so new to you.”

And the cousins talked on for hours till it was nearly luncheon time, and they walked slowly back to the house. Then Alice flew to her sister, and told her the great piece of news.

Agnes was not much surprised; she seemed to have known from the first how it would be; but she clasped her dearly-loved sister in a tight loving embrace as she murmured,—“You will not stay away long, Alice darling, promise me that.”

And Alice promised.

Nothing particular occurred during the next few days of Lady Frances's visit. They passed slowly enough to all the party, except, perhaps, to Agnes, who grudged every hour of her sister's companionship. Having gained her point, Constance's manner underwent a considerable change, and Alice soon found

Georgina a much pleasanter and livelier companion.

On Friday Miss Fairfax called, and had a long talk with Alice on the subject of Lady Frances's invitation. Alice urged that it could not be wrong to do what her father and Agnes had consented to her doing.

"If your father had not been half in his dotage, he never *would* have consented," was Miss Fairfax's strongly-worded reply; "and as for Agnes, she is the most unselfish creature that ever breathed; but you know what her wishes are. I have a letter here which you shall read; it is from your dear mother, written a few months before her death, in which she expresses an earnest hope that neither of her children would ever enter London society under the care of her sister Frances. You will attend to this, Alice."

Alice cried and pleaded, but would not abandon her object, and the interview ended with no satisfactory result, and a good deal of irritation on both sides.

On Sunday morning they all went to church—Lady Frances professedly to see the new clergyman, Constance because she thought it

the correct thing to do, and Georgina because the others went, and she did not care to be left alone. Whatever might be thought of Mr. Dalgetty in private life, there was but one opinion in Southport of his abilities as a preacher.

Clear, earnest, and unaffected, he seemed to lose all his nervous self-consciousness when in the pulpit, and spoke with a force and dignity very rare in so young a man. It was strange that he should have selected for his sermon this verse in the twenty-second chapter of Jeremiah:—"Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him; but weep sore for him that goeth away, for he shall return no more, nor see his native country." The sermon had not been written with any reference to Alice, but with an idea of imparting consolation to some lately bereaved families in the town; but some parts were singularly applicable to one who, like her, was about to leave a happy home and friends who were tried and true, for a new and untried existence.

Did the words of the text fall with a melancholy and prophetic significance on the ears of any of the party? It is impossible to tell;

but even Lady Frances lost her listless, pre-occupied air, and Alice listened earnestly, her golden head bowed low as the preacher spoke of the danger of those who insisted on wilfully choosing their own lot in life, unthinking of God's commandments, and unheeding of His will.

But the impression soon passed off, and a walk home with Georgina, who happened to be in one of her merriest moods, effectually dispelled all serious thoughts for the present.

Later in the evening, Mr. Dalgetty called, with a message from Miss Fairfax, who had not visited the house since Alice's rejection of her advice. Agnes told him of her sister's intended visit to London. He heard the news with his usual calmness, though a close observer might have seen his lip quiver and his cheek blanch, as one who has received a heavy blow. Lady Frances was not slow to note these signs, and inwardly congratulated herself that her visit had not been postponed for a few weeks. However, she made herself very agreeable to the young clergyman, who paid a very short visit, and was even more silent and cold than ordinary.

When he said farewell to Alice, his voice trembled a little as he wished her a pleasant visit, and he held her hand in a close grasp, which seemed as if it never would uncloze, and such a loving, yearning light in his eyes. Then, as if suddenly conscious that he was acting strangely, he dropped the fair little hand as if it had been a burning coal, bowed to Lady Frances, and went out—into the darkness.

## CHAPTER IV.

Oh, thou child of many prayers,  
Life hath quicksands—life hath snares.  
Care and age come unawares.  
Bear through sorrow, wrong and ruth,  
In thy heart the dew of youth,  
On thy lips the smile of truth.

THE end of June, and the height of the London season. The trees in the squares had lost their bright green tinting, and were covered with a thin layer of dust, and the toilettes in the Park had also lost something of their first freshness, as well as the fair faces which belonged to them.

The fatigues of an unusually hot and trying campaign were beginning to tell on the elderly chaperones as well as on their young charges, but they did not seem to have affected Lady Frances Lascelles. Look at her now as she sits opposite the writing-table in her prettily furnished morning-room in Lowndes Street.

The fair, haughty face has scarcely a line in it, in spite of her forty-five years, and just now the red curved lips wear a smile of inward satisfaction, which adds considerably to their beauty. She is perusing a letter from her intended son-in-law, Lord Braughton; let us hope that it contains good news.

In a low easy-chair, near her Ladyship, sits her niece, Alice Godolphin, considerably changed by her three weeks of London fashionable life. The golden hair is no longer arranged in neat plaits round the pretty head, but is strained back from the fair temples, and rolled into a lofty chignon behind—the glory of hair-dressers and ladies'-maids. She wears a cool morning-dress of blue and white muslin, fashionably trimmed with narrow lace; a handsome gold locket, and pearl drops in the small ears. But the cheeks have already lost their fresh pink bloom, and there is a tired look in the blue eyes that never used to be there. No wonder, for last night was one of the most crowded balls of the season, and the girls are naturally much fatigued by their seven hours of hard exercise, to say nothing of hot rooms and much excitement. So reasons Lady Frances;

and if Alice is more exhausted than is quite right and natural after her fourth ball, it is easily to be accounted for by her short experience and country training.

Georgina strolled into the room in her riding-habit about eleven o'clock, and shortly afterwards the door opened, and "Captain Godolphin" was announced. A young man of about seven and twenty entered the room with the easy familiar air of one who is certain of being well received.

"Are you going to ride with us this morning, Reginald?" asked Georgina, after the usual greetings.

"No, thanks; it's too hot. You won't want an escort if you join the Murrays. I should like a turn under the trees. Will you come into the Park, Aunt Frances? The air will do you good."

Lady Frances looked at Alice, who declined walking on the plea of fatigue, but begged that no one would stay at home for her.

So her Ladyship left the room to dress, and soon after Georgina mounted her pretty chestnut, and rode away with the groom behind her.



Alice and Captain Godolphin were left alone, and for a few minutes neither of them spoke. Let us look at the young officer as he stands by the writing-table, amusing himself by turning over and disarranging Lady Frances's writing materials. He is worth looking at, for he is universally considered to be the handsomest man in the Guards, some say in the army. His tall graceful figure, straight features, and bright dark blue eyes, with a certain haughty air which was quite natural and became him admirably, formed a *tout ensemble* that had made many a lady's heart ache—for love, and many a man's—for envy. There was a certain resemblance in those aristocratic features to the earlier portraits of Charles the First, though there was certainly no resemblance in character between the ill-fated Stuart monarch and the gay young officer.

Captain Godolphin was a distant relation of Alice's father. Lady Frances Lascelles had taken a fancy to him when he was a handsome Eton boy, and had allowed him to presume upon his very slight connection with her by calling her his aunt, and her daughters his cousins. It had been a matter of much sur-

prise in fashionable London circles that so worldly-wise a woman as Lady Frances should have allowed her daughters to grow up on terms of intimacy with a young man who was really no relation to them, and “still the wonder grew,” for as years passed on, and Constance and Georgina were fast growing up, and Reginald entered the Guards, no change took place,—Lady Frances still treated him with affection, and encouraged him to consider her house as his home at all times.

This was not, however, quite so extraordinary as it seemed at first sight. To use a vulgar phrase, Lady Frances “knew her man,” and was perfectly aware that if Reginald married at all, it would be an heiress; neither of her daughters’ fortunes, ample as they were, would be anything like sufficient for him. Besides, Constance and Georgina had learned to look upon him with the kindly, friendly indifference of sisters; so Lady Frances felt herself quite secure, and rejoiced that she was not called upon to separate herself from old ties, as far as the young Guardsman was concerned. But the wisest of us may make a slip sometimes, and Lady Frances had made a

false move in allowing Captain Godolphin to frequent the house at all times and seasons during the first few weeks of Alice's introduction into society. Although he was presumptive heir to a baronetcy and six thousand a year, his character as a flirt was so well established that the most sanguine and despairing of London mothers had alike long ceased to consider him an eligible candidate for the matrimonial market.

But Alice knew nothing of all this; she had seen so few men, and in her eyes he was a hero of romance, a Bayard, *sans peur et sans reproche*. He realized all that she had hitherto only dreamt of in poems and the old-fashioned novels which she had studied in the long summer evenings at Southport. She would have argued with Miranda, that "nothing ill can dwell in such a temple." At present it was only a romantic fancy on her part, but these enthusiastic admirations are dangerous things for little country girls. Neither Lady Frances nor Constance perceived this growing absorption. They had come to consider Reginald Godolphin so completely as one of themselves, that they would as soon have thought of Alice

falling in love with old Sir Hugh as with her handsome cousin. Strange, unaccountable blindness; but these things happen every day.

To return to the present occasion. After a few minutes' silence, Alice looked up and asked Captain Godolphin to draw down the blind, as the light hurt her eyes. He moved to obey, but as he drew near to the window his foot caught in the little round table, and upset it, scattering the workbox and its delicate appendages in all directions.

"How could I have been so awkward!" he exclaimed, with much vexation. "It is broken, I fear." The ready tears filled Alice's eyes, for the workbox had been a gift from her sister, and she valued it greatly. "I am so very sorry; you will never forgive me," continued Captain Godolphin.

Alice smiled through her tears.—"Pray say no more about it; perhaps I can get it mended. This was the only thing of real value in the box, and it is not injured." It was a small ivory miniature, framed in dark blue velvet.

"May I see it?" asked Captain Godolphin, gently. He carried it to the window, and

gazed at it for some moments with deep attention. It was a portrait of Alice's mother, Lady Mary Godolphin. There was a great resemblance to Alice in the colouring and form of feature, but the expression was so totally different that it almost destroyed the likeness. Alice's pretty blue eyes could never have had the depth of expression which distinguished Lady Mary's, and her rosebud mouth entirely lacked the firm decision which characterized her mother's. Captain Godolphin returned the picture, saying,—“It is you, Miss Godolphin, ten years hence, when you will have loved and suffered.”

“Ah,” said she, smiling, “il faut souffrir pour être belle.”

“No,” he replied, warmly, “nothing could make you more beautiful than you are; but there is an expression in that face” (and he pointed to the miniature now lying open on her lap) “which does not come till after many years of sorrow, generally love sorrow.”

Alice knew her mother's married life had not been very happy, and she gazed sadly on the portrait, which had now a fresh interest for her. Then she looked up with a smile,—“I

hope, then, my face will never resemble my mother's more than it does now. An unhappy love! What a terrible thing! Surely it comes to very few."

"I trust it may never come to you."

He bent forward, and spoke in a low, earnest voice, and Alice looked up in surprise, for it was the first really serious remark she had ever heard from his lips, but at that moment Lady Frances entered, and the conversation ceased.

"Take care of yourself, Alice," she said, "and get well rested for this evening. I wish you would take this letter up to Constance. It is from Lord Braughton, and she will like to see it." And her Ladyship sailed away, followed by the somewhat reluctant Captain, who had not reckoned on the doubtful pleasure of chaperoning Lady Frances *alone* for an hour and a half in the Row.

That afternoon, as Alice returned from her drive, she found a small square parcel lying in the hall directed to her. Some instinct prompted her to seize it and rush upstairs unperceived, when she undid the numerous wrappings, and discovered a beautiful inlaid

workbox, evidently of Indian workmanship. There was no note or card to be found, though she carefully turned over each layer of paper ; but, of course, there could be no doubt that it came from Captain Godolphin, as an atonement for his morning's carelessness.

“How lovely it is, and how very kind of him,” thought Alice. “Aunt Frances must see it;” and she moved towards the door, when a sudden thought came into her mind, and, instead of taking it downstairs, she placed it in a drawer, locked it, and put the key in her pocket. “No one shall see it,” she murmured to herself. “Aunt Frances might think I ought not to keep it, and Constance would say disagreeable things. I will tell Agnes all about it when I go home.” And she rang the bell for Parkins, and proceeded to dress for the business of the evening.

Very lovely did Alice look that night, in a pale blue dress, and a wreath of forget-me-nots in her golden hair. They went to a ball that night in Berkeley Square; and the hostess, Lady Eastcliffe, gazed with undisguised admiration at the young *débutante* as she was introduced to her, and whispered to her aunt,—“You are the

only woman in London, Frances, who would venture on bringing out a girl like *that*, with two marriageable daughters of your own."

Lady Frances smiled serenely, and passed on.

Later in the evening, when the hostess was at liberty, and the subject was again discussed, Lady Frances observed that her elder daughter was already disposed of; and Georgina could not be considered as fairly introduced till next spring. "So," she continued, "I judged this a favourable moment for introducing my niece; she must make good use of her time this season, for I shall not give her another."

"Jove, what a pretty girl!" observed a young red-haired man to Captain Godolphin, as he was making his way through the crowded rooms. "Who is she?"

"My cousin, Miss Godolphin; don't you know them?"

"No; wish I did. Haven't seen anything so nice since Miss Courtwright took us all by storm two years ago. Introduce me, will you?"

Captain Godolphin complied, but Alice had no dances to spare, so her red-haired admirer, Lord Danvers by name, took up his position in a corner of the ball-room, adjusted his eye-



glass, and amused himself by staring fixedly at her, with an air of well-bred insolence only attainable by a young English dandy of the first water.

When Alice returned to her seat, after the next round dance, she found Lady Frances conversing with a tall, dark young man, of unmistakably military appearance, whom she introduced as Major Bartram. His pleasant, dark sensible eyes met hers for a moment; then the band struck up the "Soldaten Lieder," and he moved away to claim his partner.

"A remarkably nice young man, my dear," whispered her Ladyship in Alice's ear; "mind you give him a dance if he asks you."

"I am afraid my card is quite full, aunt. I have just refused a friend of Captain Godolphin's, Lord Danvers."

"You little goose," muttered Lady Frances, "what does it signify if you have a dance to spare or not? Can't people *forget* their engagements sometimes, or lose your card, if it is necessary. Lord Danvers is a very delightful person; I knew his mother well. He inherited all the Easton property. Pray, do not refuse him a second time."

In Lady Frances's vocabulary, a "very nice young man" generally implied eight hundred a year at least and expectations; a "most agreeable man" might be understood to mean a prospective title and a good income; while "a very delightful person" never meant less than an earldom and several thousands a year.

The next dance was claimed by Captain Godolphin; and as Alice leant on his arm, and they walked down the long ball-room, many eyes were turned upon them, and many low murmurs of admiration might have been heard. But Alice had no ears for any such praises. Was she not leaning on *his* arm, listening to *his* voice, and earth seemed to have no greater or more intoxicating pleasure to offer. She was passing through the first and most bewildering stage of "Love's young dream."

And had Captain Godolphin no tender feelings for the beautiful girl who showed so artlessly her intense admiration for himself. Most certainly he had. He admired her very much, perhaps more than any one he had ever seen; but marriage—the idea never entered his head.

Nor did he deliberately intend to behave

badly to her. She was a very pretty little girl, and it was great fun to see her large blue eyes looking up at him with as much reverence as if he had been a demi-god, her fair cheeks flushing with delighted surprise if he addressed the smallest compliment to her. Such perfect ignorance (of the world) and simplicity he had never met with before, and there was a piquancy about it which formed for the time a powerful attraction to the *blasé* young Guardsman.

Take care, Captain Godolphin, such fragile toys are too precious for you to play with. That loving heart which you are winning so easily will love but once in a lifetime, and that tenderly, devotedly, and *for ever*.

"I must thank you for sending me that beautiful workbox, Captain Godolphin," said she, as they passed from the hot ball-room into the conservatory. "It is very much handsomer than the one you broke this morning."

"I am glad you like it," he replied, looking into her blue eyes. "I brought it from India some years ago, when I went out with the —th."

"I wonder it has not been given to some other lady before this; I suppose you kept it locked up, or many would have envied it."

"I would not give it to *every one*," he replied. "Once I used to think my wife should use it, if I ever married. As it is, it has not gone out of the family. I look upon you as a cousin, Miss Godolphin."

She did not answer, for at that moment a lady and gentleman entered the conservatory and advanced towards them.

"I was looking for you, Godolphin," said the gentleman, who was Major Bartram. "Lady Frances wishes Miss Godolphin to join her at once, as she is going home."

"Home so early," exclaimed Alice.

"Yes, I believe Miss Lascelles is not very well; the heat of the room, or something."

"I will go at once," said Alice; and they returned to the ball-room to find Constance looking very white and faint, surrounded by a circle of sympathizing friends, armed with fans and scent-bottles, Lady Frances standing at a little distance, giving orders about the carriage, and looking much more annoyed than sympathizing.

After some delay, the carriage was announced and the Lascelles party drove home, Constance still looking white and ill, Lady

Frances very cross, and Alice in the seventh heaven of delight, owing to a certain loving squeeze of the hand she had lately experienced, and a sentence which was still sounding in her ears, "Good-bye, Miss Godolphin, I shall count the hours till we meet to-morrow." Light words, lightly spoken; had Captain Godolphin known how fondly they would be remembered by this foolish girl, perhaps in very pity he might not have uttered them.

Surely in love, as in fishing, Dr. Johnson's celebrated sarcasm often holds good, with a slight alteration—a knave at one end, a fool at the other. Yet Captain Godolphin meant no serious harm. He was only young and thoughtless, and perhaps a little selfish.

"Going home, Godolphin?" asked Major Bartram, a little later in the evening.

"Yes; I shall walk, it's a lovely night. Have a cigar, old fellow?"

And the two friends walked down the square, side by side, not sorry to escape from the heated ball-room, with all its attractions, into the freshness of the calm, star-lit night.

"You are paying that pretty Miss Godol-

phin a good deal of attention," observed the Major, at length. "Anything serious this time?"

"You ought to know better than to ask, Bartram," was the somewhat testy answer. "The girl is nice enough, but she hasn't a farthing. I must marry money, and that soon, or you will shortly see a paragraph in the *Morning Post* announcing the lamentable disappearance of Captain Godolphin from society, owing to his detention in the Queen's Bench."

"Can't your uncle help you?"

"He says he has paid my debts five times already, and declines to do it again. To do the old fellow justice, I believe he is badly off for ready money himself. The only way he can help me is by 'shuffling off this mortal coil' altogether, and that he has not the slightest intention of doing."

"He is an old man, is he not?"

"Old! I should think so. He has not a tooth in his jaws, or a hair on his head. And what pleasure he can have in life I can't understand, but he clings to it like a limpet to a rock. Four times, at least, during the past

year he has been at the point of death; but these ancient fossils have as many lives as a cat. I heard from him on Thursday, and he says he is remarkably well; has just dismissed his doctor, and hopes to come up to town for the fag end of the season. Cheering, isn't it?"

"I am very sorry for you, Godolphin, but you will not mend matters by breaking that little girl's heart."

"You are growing sentimental, Bartram. It's that villainous champagne; I feel quite low myself."

"I am in earnest, Godolphin. That girl is not to be played with. I am something of a physiognomist, and I read in her face that some day she will love 'not wisely, but too well.' Leave these innocent young things alone; they are not fair game."

"I am much obliged for your advice." And Captain Godolphin stopped abruptly before the Guards' Club. "I am going in here. Will you come?"

"No, thanks. I am due at Lady Aston's. Good-night."

"Good-night."

And they parted more coldly than they had done for many years.

It was a strange chance that had thrown these two men together. More opposite characters never existed. Major Bartram was highly principled, steady, just and honourable in all his dealings; in short, a good man. Captain Godolphin was selfish, dissipated, careless, if not actually sceptical, on religious points, and most inordinately vain. Perhaps the last spark of real worth that existed in his nature would have been extinguished if he had lost the friendship of Major Bartram, and he clung to that early attachment as men do cling to the last pure and holy feeling that remains to them from their infancy. And for Major Bartram—did he see in the world-hardened nature of the younger officer a germ of better things that might blossom some day under the genial influence of a wise friendship, but would be lost for ever if left entirely to itself?

However it might be, they loved each other dearly; and much as Reginald Godolphin needed money, he would cheerfully have given up all hope of ever inheriting his uncle's pro-



perty, had such a sacrifice been necessary to the welfare of his friend. They went to rest that night with the mutual determination that no "fool of a girl" should interfere to mar their old friendship. A wise resolve, had it only been kept.

## CHAPTER V.

Seeing all our guilt and weakness, looking down with  
pitying eyes,  
For the foolish things we cling to, and the Heaven that  
we despise.

From "Guardian Angels." LYRA ANGLICANA.

## LETTER FROM ALICE TO AGNES.

"106, Lowndes Street, June 30th.

"MY DEAREST AGNES,—I received your letter on Monday, and ought to have answered it before, but I have so little time for anything in this bustling place. The days fly like magic, and one has 'nothing to show' for them, as Miss Fairfax would say. A great part of the morning I spend in resting for the fatigues of the evening, which are sometimes very great. On Wednesday night we went to three balls, one after the other, and I was good for nothing till the afternoon of the next

day. I think it is the not being used to low dresses that has given me a troublesome cough, and I am much thinner even in these few weeks, but otherwise I feel quite well. Last night we were at Lady Eastcliffe's dance, but had to come home early, as Constance fainted, or something like it.

"She is not in good spirits, which I wonder at, as Lord Braughton has written to say he is coming home much sooner than was expected. I dare say they will be married before August. We see very little of Georgie, except in the morning, when she rides with us. Her time is taken up a good deal with masters; Aunt Frances says she does not want her to be seen much this season, in order that she may 'burst fresh on the world' next year, when she will be introduced. I must tell you a thing which happened last night, which has made me care for Aunt Frances so *much* more than I did before. She gave me leave to turn over her jewel case while she dressed for dinner, and I happened to touch the spring of a tiny secret drawer, in which lay two little locks of hair carefully wrapped up in silver paper. I asked her whose hair it was, and her face changed in

a moment, and grew so pale and sad, as she took them from me, and said,—‘This dark hair was cut from the head of my little Hugh, who died when he was two years old; and this golden curl belonged to his little brother Arthur, who only lived a few months.’ I had never heard of them, and I did not like to ask more, there was something so mournful in the way she said,—‘It is more than twenty years ago. Put them away, Alice; I never look at them now.’ And she turned to the glass and began to put on her rouge, and talk of other subjects in her usual way; but I am glad to find she has *one* soft place in her heart. I had almost doubted it.

“You must not think from this that she is not kind to me; she has given me some lovely dresses, and pays for everything I want; but I did not fancy she could have loved anything so much as she must have loved those two dear little boys.

“We see very little of Uncle Hugh; he is generally at the House. We went to the Ladies’ Gallery to hear a debate last Tuesday; Aunt Frances took Constance and me. I can’t say my reverence for the High Court

of Parliament was very much increased by what I saw. We were rather early, so we walked through the House before going upstairs; and, of course, I imagined that the few members who were sitting about on the green leather benches were discussing the weighty affairs of the nation.

“However, one couple that we passed were disputing the price of oysters, and another pompous-looking gentleman was telling a long story about an accident which had happened to his wife’s pony-chaise. Of course, the real business had not commenced, but still it seemed incongruous to hear such commonplace subjects discussed in the House of Parliament.

“A Colonel ——— made a long speech, during which the appearance of the House reminded me of the description of the behaviour of the animals in ‘Alice in Wonderland,’ — ‘the creatures paid no attention.’ Some members were fast asleep (I counted seven), some were talking, and a great many were walking about, and going in and out. You will be tired of this long scrawl, dear Agnes, and my hand shakes so that you will

hardly be able to read it. My love to dear papa.

“Your loving sister,  
“ALICE.

“How is Mr. Dalgetty? I have heard no sermons like his since I left home.”

This letter arrived at Southport on the afternoon of the following day, and Agnes read it aloud to Miss Fairfax, who happened to be calling at the time.

“Not a word about coming home,” was that lady’s first comment on the letter.

“No,” said Agnes, rather sadly. “I should be sorry for her to hurry away when she is enjoying herself so much. And there is no need; papa is pretty well, better than when she left.”

“There is another thing I notice,” continued Miss Fairfax. “Her former letters have been full of that Captain Godolphin; how he looked, where he went, what he said, and all the rest of it. She has now ceased to mention him at all, and yet I am certain he is often there. It is not a good sign, Agnes; that child wants looking after.”

“I am more uneasy about her cough.”

“Yes, your mother’s children should be careful of any tendency to lung disease. Her Ladyship would never notice it, if she were coughing herself into her grave. I see only one thing to be done, Agnes. I will go up to town to-morrow and see her; take a return ticket if possible, and be back here on Saturday.”

“It would be a great relief, but the trouble—the expense, dear Miss Fairfax; I could not ask—”

“You have not asked, my dear; I have made up my mind. I shall see your sister to-morrow; and if she is looking ill or worried, I shall bring her back with me.”

“You will let me write a line to say you are coming?”

“No, thank you, I would rather you did not.”

“But Alice may be out.”

“Then I shall wait till she comes in.”

It was of no use to argue further, and Agnes thanked her old friend heartily for her kindness, and went upstairs to read Alice’s letter to her father, who fell fast asleep in the midst of it.

On her way home Miss Fairfax called in at Mr. Dalgetty's lodging, to ask for his escort to the station on the following morning. To these simple country folk, a journey to London seemed nearly as formidable an undertaking as a voyage to India to us Londoners. Mr. Dalgetty assented at once, the more gladly when he heard her errand.

"I trust you have no reason to be uneasy about Miss Alice?" he asked.

Miss Fairfax glanced at his anxious face, and answered warily, mindful of a certain interview that had taken place five weeks ago.

"Well, no, I don't know that we have. Agnes is fidgetting about her being away so long. I go up chiefly to relieve her mind, and settle a day for Alice's return. Good evening."

And she departed, leaving the young clergyman with a heart full of anxious fears and forebodings. A friend may be deceived, a lover never; and he read in Miss Fairfax's honest face a deeper anxiety than was expressed by her cheerful words.

The afternoon of the next day was one of the hottest of the season. In Lady Frances's



drawing-room the blinds were all drawn down, and the doors wide open, and yet the atmosphere was oppressively hot. Constance reclined on the sofa, her head turned away from the light, her pure pale profile standing out in relief against the crimson cushion. The young lady was enjoying an afternoon siesta. Alice was leaning back in her favourite easy-chair, her hands crossed in her lap, her general aspect one of quiet enjoyment. Near her, by the fire-place, stood Captain Godolphin, his handsome, dark head occasionally bent towards her, as he turned over the pages of a photograph-book, and made his somewhat free comments on its contents. Away from the others, at the farthest end of the room, sat Lady Frances and Lady Eastcliffe, in close consultation. Let us listen for a moment to their conversation.

“I assure you, my dear Frances,” says Lady Eastcliffe, “there is no doubt that what I tell you is the case. The young man admires her immensely. He said to me the other night, ‘That girl has the most perfect face I ever saw.’”

“That is an unusual admission certainly,”

sighed Lady Frances. "The young men of the present day are so undemonstrative, 'rather nice-looking' is the utmost one can ever get from them now."

"Depend upon it, it is a case of love at first sight. A rare thing, I grant you, in this generation, but I have seen enough of young men to be able to tell pretty well when they are in earnest and when they are not. You may make your niece Lady Danvers if you choose. But remember, Frances (and the speaker lowered her voice), a man's foes are often of his own household. I mistrust that Captain Godolphin."

"Reginald? Oh, he is a safe man; it is all play on his part."

"Possibly, but is it on hers? Look."

The two ladies turned their heads simultaneously, and beheld a pretty tableau. Captain Godolphin had detached a sprig of forget-me-not from the tiny bouquet in his coat, and was holding it to Alice's eyes, to "match their colour," he said. She was looking down, her lips trembling, her cheeks glowing, while he murmured some tender words not audible at that distance.

Lady Frances bit her lip. "Alice, dear,

will you come and fill up these dinner-cards for me?" she said, in her usual sweet voice, but with a tone of command that showed she meant to be obeyed.

Alice rose, and just at that moment the door opened, and "Miss Fairfax" was announced. Lady Eastcliffe uttered a smothered exclamation, and well she might. The good lady's dress was not materially altered since it was last described in these pages. The print bedgown was, however, nearly covered by a round black-silk cape trimmed with fringe, which might have been fashionable twenty years ago, and the large hat was replaced by a straw bonnet, of unusual shape and size, ornamented with a green gauze veil. The dress was not unbecoming or unsuitable to a lady of her years, and it was cool and comfortable, though somewhat eccentric in these days of enormous crinolines and invisible bonnets.

After a while, Lady Frances proposed that Alice should take her friend into the dining-room, and give her some luncheon; and, as soon as the door was closed, she turned to Lady Eastcliffe, and said, in a vexed tone,—  
"All my work will now be undone. That

female Guy" (when Lady Frances was out of temper her expressions were not always choice) "has come to take her home. I am convinced of it."

"You will not allow that, surely," said Captain Godolphin, coming forward.

"It is no affair of yours, Reginald," was the sharp reply. "I can only say it will be a very disrespectful and ungrateful way of treating me, after all the trouble I have had."

Lady Eastcliffe broke in with some soothing words, and her Ladyship calmed down by degrees when she had fully made up her mind that she would be justified in detaining her niece till her sister came in person to fetch her. "And that," she said, triumphantly, "is next to impossible, for her father will never allow her the money for the journey."

Meanwhile, a scarcely less uncomfortable conversation was taking place in the dining-room.

"My dear Alice," said Miss Fairfax, while disposing of her plate of cutlets, "Agnes is anxious that you should fix a day for coming home. Shall I tell her that she may expect you next week?"

“Next week!” said Alice, in an extinguished voice. “Agnes has not mentioned any time to me in her letters.”

“Nor has she to me, but I know what her wishes are. Give me a potato, Alice, and tell me who that young man is I saw upstairs.”

What a flood of colour rushed over Alice’s cheeks! She stooped down to pick a crumb off the carpet as she answered,—“That is Captain Godolphin.”

“I thought so. My dear, why are you groping under the table? It makes you cough. How are you feeling now as to health?”

“Better, I think. My cough is very troublesome at night,” answered Alice, much relieved by the change of subject.

“Any pain in your side?”

“Not much, only at times. It is not of any consequence. Dear Miss Fairfax, surely you did not come all this way just to see after my health?”

“You need not trouble yourself. I can afford the time very well. Who is that painted woman upstairs?”

“Lady Eastcliffe. We were at her ball on Thursday night.”

“Where you danced with Captain Godolphin, I presume.”

Again that rush of colour. This time it was noted by Miss Fairfax, who pushed away her unfinished luncheon, and, leaning forward, said earnestly,—“We are old friends, Alice. Tell me, has that young man been paying you any particular attentions?”

“No; oh, no.” Pride, fear, shyness, all prompted the quick denial, but Alice’s cheeks grew white as death as she uttered her first deliberate falsehood.

“Ah, that is well,” said Miss Fairfax, in a relieved tone. She never thought of doubting Alice’s perfect truth. “I feared it might have been so, and the young man does not bear a very high character. I have heard of him from my friend Mrs. Bartram. By-the-bye, she has a son in London. Have you met him?”

“We have just been introduced.”

Another hour passed in quiet talk, and then Miss Fairfax rose. “Well, my child, you are looking better than I expected,” said she. “I wish I could have persuaded you to fix a day for returning home. It would have been glad news to take back to Agnes.”

“I will consult Aunt Frances, and write to you. Good-bye, dear Miss Fairfax.”

“Good-bye, Alice. I wish you were returning with me. I have a feeling that it would be better for you. But I am relieved on one point at least;” and, with many kind words, she took her departure, and, when the door fairly closed upon her, Alice threw herself on the sofa in an irrepressible burst of tears. Poor child! a career of deception was the only one open to her now, and she felt it bitterly.

The next day, Miss Fairfax returned to Southport, and gave Agnes a full account of her visit. “I did not press her to return with me,” she said, “I saw it would be of no use.”

“You did quite right,” said Agnes. “It must be left to herself.” But her pillow that night was wet with many tears—no unusual thing now.

## CHAPTER VI.

Like cliffs which have been rent asunder,  
They stood aloof—the scars remaining,  
But neither rain, or frost, or thunder,  
Shall ever do away, I ween,  
The marks of that which once hath been.

COLERIDGE.

THREE weeks afterwards, two gentlemen were sitting in close consultation in a small but luxuriously furnished apartment in St. James's Street. The elder of the two, Major Bartram, was seated by the table, examining a formidable-looking pile of bills and papers, an anxious, harassed look on his kind face, never brought there by his own troubles. Near him, in an easy-chair, sat Captain Godolphin, a cigar between his lips. Ah! he looks very different now to the light-hearted young soldier he appeared ten minutes ago, when escorting his cousins home from their afternoon ride. The ladies would scarcely have recognized their



gay cavalier in the worn-looking man he appears now, a weary, anxious look on his face, which brings out all the lines, and adds ten years to his age. Few of us can boast of wearing the same expression in our strict privacy that we manage to do before the world; but it is to be hoped that the change is seldom so complete, so saddening, as that which darkened the handsome face of the young Guardsman. After a silence of half an hour or so, Major Bartram looked up.

“I can make nothing of it, Godolphin. You must sell out.”

“Ruined, am I? I thought so; the luck has been against me from the first. I actually proposed to Miss Hardcastle last night, as a *dernier ressort*, and was refused.”

“You *did*?”

“Well, what is there so astonishing in it? Her eighty thousand pounds would have cleared off my debts, and placed me in smooth water again. I might have kept afloat then till my aggravating old uncle departed this life.”

A few minutes' silence, then Major Bartram spoke in a dry, cold tone,—“I see you have forgotten the old French motto we used to

think so grand, 'Tout est perdu fors l'honneur.'"

"What do you mean?"

"What I have said. When you proposed to Miss Hardcastle (whether she accepted you or not), you acted in a dishonourable, heartless way. There is only one girl in London you have any business to marry, and that is Alice Godolphin."

Captain Godolphin's cheek flushed; he laid down his cigar, and looked steadily at his friend. "Bartram, you talk like a fool. You have seen how my affairs stand. How is it possible for me, even if I had the will, to marry a penniless girl like my cousin?"

"It would have been more impossible for most men to have acted as you have done. Hear me patiently, Godolphin. Your names are coupled in all the clubs, and in every ball-room in London. I have been asked a dozen times during the last fortnight when you are to be married. You have paid the girl every possible attention that lay in your power; she loves you with her whole heart and soul (that is evident enough), and now, by Jove, you coolly tell me that you have just proposed to another woman."

The Major spoke with considerable heat; his honest soul was vexed to the core. Captain Godolphin rose, his dark eyes flashing. He did not speak, but pointed silently to the door.

“You wish me to leave you?”

“What you have said makes it necessary that you should, unless you retract your words. Further, if you leave the room without an apology to me, we cannot meet again as friends.”

“I cannot retract my words,” said Major Bartram, sadly. “Perhaps I spoke too hastily under the circumstances; my excuse is that I have been grievously disappointed in you, and we are old friends. We cannot separate in this way, Godolphin. Shake hands, old fellow, and forget that I have spoken.”

Captain Godolphin turned his head away, and his voice came hoarse and low. “I have borne a good deal from you on this subject, and I will bear no more. There are some things that I will not allow even you to say to me. You have accused me of behaving dishonourably. It can be no pleasure to you to associate with a dishonoured man. Leave

me—with my dishonour; I will not trouble you.”

Major Bartram was sorely perplexed. After a few minutes, he came up close to his friend, and laid his hand kindly on his shoulder. “Be true to yourself, Godolphin. You *know* I spoke the truth, and I cannot retract it. But I am ready to own that I spoke hastily, if not impertinently. Will you shake hands before I go?”

Captain Godolphin stood like a statue; but he had turned away his face so that it could not be seen.

“We have been friends for twenty years, Godolphin; can a trifle separate us at last?”

No answer, no movement. Major Bartram waited while you might have counted ten slowly; then he walked to the door, looked round once more, and then left the house for ever. Surely Captain Godolphin’s better angel departed with him. As he heard the door close, he started, and would almost have recalled his old friend, had it been possible. But it was not, and he sat down and strove to collect his scattered, bewildered thoughts. One word was ever before his eyes, beating in his brain,

driving him to the verge of distraction, and that word was "Ruin." And he had driven from him the only friend who could or would have helped him. He sat for a long time in a dull trance of misery, when suddenly an evil thought came into his mind—an evil thought, but still one which brought back light to his eyes and hope to his heart: he would marry his cousin, Georgina Lascelles.

It was true that she was little more than a child in years, true that Sir Hugh would never willingly consent to the marriage, and that Lady Frances would accuse him of basest ingratitude and treachery. All this signified little to Captain Godolphin. She had ten thousand pounds of her own, enough at least to save him from the immediate ruin and dishonour which threatened him. Then she was a good little girl, very partial to him, and very sick of her life in the school-room. It would not be a difficult task to make her love him, and consent to marry him, and then—a fig for Lady Frances and her objections. His creditors would delay the threatened proceedings against him, if it was known that he was about to marry one of the Misses Lascelles, for,

as usually happens, their fortunes had been much exaggerated, and they had the reputation of heiresses.

This plan once conceived, Captain Godolphin prepared to carry it out with characteristic tact and ingenuity. His first move was naturally to discontinue his very pointed attentions to Alice. This he could easily do without awaking the slightest suspicion in the mind of Lady Frances, who would naturally suppose that her dear Reginald had taken the very decided hint which she had given him after Lady Eastcliffe's warning, and was purposely keeping out of the way, in order to further Lord Danvers's attentions to her niece.

But we are anticipating. The day after his quarrel with Major Bartram, Captain Godolphin called in Lowndes Street, and fortune smiled upon him, for all the family were out with the exception of Georgina. That young lady was making a pretence of study in the hottest of hot school-rooms, a German exercise, just begun, lying open before her, which seemed to stand a poor chance of being ever finished. Her governess had retired to her own room, ostensibly to write a letter, in reality to enjoy

an afternoon nap, an indulgence which was particularly agreeable to her Italian nature.

Lady Frances was safely disposed of in the carriage for the next two hours, so Captain Godolphin at once applied himself to the task of fascinating his young cousin, and succeeded so well, that she informed Constance in the evening that she had no idea Reginald could be "so jolly,"—he had talked to her just as if she had been grown up.

Constance smiled, in no way discomposed,—the idea of any one trying to flirt with "Georgie" was too ridiculous. People forget that at seventeen the bridge is passed, which separates childhood from maidenhood, and that an indelible impression may be made on the heart of a young girl who still wears her hair down her back, and is not yet promoted to the dignity of "long dresses." Not that either of these was the case with Georgina Lascelles. In appearance she might easily have been taken for nineteen, and, like most girls of the present day, she was fit (or imagined herself fit) for the drawing-room when she had scarcely left the nursery. Besides, she was growing heartily tired of her

anomalous position, compelled, when no longer a child, to submit to a childish routine ; and she gladly welcomed the attentions of her (so-called) cousin as a diversion, if nothing more. It is a mistake to suppose that young ladies of seventeen will submit to the rules and regulations which are suitable enough at seven. This is just the age when the influence of a tender and judicious mother is most required to guide and cherish the young plant, which, if neglected *now*, will most probably run wild and unprofitable for ever. But Lady Frances had neither time nor inclination for any such duties, and Madame Bettini, who was a bad specimen of a very doubtful class, was but a poor substitute for a mother.

Under these favourable circumstances, Captain Godolphin hoped to overcome easily the obstacles that lay in his path, and already felt assured of speedy success. The next day he joined his cousins as usual in their morning ride, and, in pursuance of his plan, kept his horse by Georgina's side nearly the whole time, interesting her vastly by the amusing conversation in which he was an adept, leaving



Alice to ride behind with Constance and Lord Danvers. The last-named gentleman did not fail to take advantage of his opportunities, and made himself (as he fondly imagined) very agreeable. Alice soon grew wearied and somewhat disgusted with the fulsome compliments which formed the staple of his Lordship's conversation, her head ached with the glare of the sun, and she felt thankful when their horses' heads were turned towards home, and the unsatisfactory ride came to an end.

It may be questioned whether any of the party had thoroughly enjoyed themselves with the exception of Georgina. Captain Godolphin was feeling his way cautiously: he had not frightened her with any lover-like expressions, but he had given her to understand that he much preferred riding with her alone to joining the rest of the party, and had gone far to establish a private understanding between them, which was his first object. Georgina could not at all understand the change in his manner, but she felt very much flattered, and considered it all very delightful and exciting. Alice had not failed to notice the

coolness which now distinguished Captain Godolphin's manner to herself, and it vexed and distressed her, but she was far from entertaining the slightest real doubt as to his constancy; and her attention was taken up at this time with another occurrence, which shall be narrated in her own words in a letter to Agnes:—

“106, Lowndes Street.

“DARLING AGNES,—I have only time for a few lines, but I must tell you of a delightful acquaintance which I have just made. I was sitting in my own room yesterday afternoon, when a message came from Aunt Frances to say that I was wanted in the drawing-room; so I went downstairs, and found such a dear old lady waiting to see me, who kissed me most affectionately, and said she had been a great friend of dear mamma's. Her name is Mrs. L'Estrange; and you cannot think how kind she has been to me. She insisted on taking me out in her carriage; and the end of it was, that I went home and spent all the afternoon with her. Her face is rather grave and stern till you grow used to it. She reminds

me of what was said of the Duchess Renée, 'You would not have loved her for her face, but you would soon have loved her face for her sake.' We became quite intimate before we parted. It was almost like having you to talk to again.

"Dear Agnes, you will think I am never, *never* coming home; but Aunt Frances won't hear of it now till after Conny's marriage, which is to take place on the 4th of August. My love to all. No time for more.

"Your loving sister,

"ALICE."

The Mrs. L'Estrange mentioned above was a most excellent and amiable woman, who, though moving in a worldly, fashionable circle, had preserved the unique simplicity of character which had rendered her such a congenial and delightful companion to Alice's mother. She had felt for the motherless girl thrown into the vortex of London society under the sole care of Lady Frances Lascelles, but her health had obliged her to leave London early in the year, and she had only just returned. She now paid Alice all the attention that lay

in her power, and generally contrived that they should spend some part of each day together, either driving or in her pretty little house in Park Lane. Had this acquaintance begun earlier in the season it might have saved Alice from the snare into which she had fallen. As it was, Mrs. L'Estrange soon perceived that she was not heart-whole, but forbore to press the young girl's confidence till they should become better acquainted.

So the days passed on. Lady Frances was absorbed in the preparations for her daughter's approaching marriage, and Constance was closeted the greater part of the day with dressmakers and milliners. Everything was most favourable for the carrying out of Captain Godolphin's secret plans. He had prevailed on Madame Bettini, partly by adroit flattery and partly by actual bribes, to allow him to join her and her young pupil in their morning walks; so that while Lady Frances imagined her youngest daughter to be studying in the school-room, or walking quietly in the Park, she was frequently roaming Kensington Gardens in company with the handsome Captain, who

found it less difficult than he imagined to feign an ardent affection for his cousin, who proved a far more original and amusing companion than he had hoped to find her.

All the sweet enchantment of "Love's young dream" was commencing for Georgina. Was it likely that she, an inexperienced girl of seventeen, should stand proof against the fascinations of a man who had won the hearts of duchesses, and had known many a proud beauty who would have been content to give up name, position, and fortune for his sake, and considered herself blest in making the sacrifice? That handsome face and bright *débonnaire* manner had hitherto proved irresistible with the fair sex, with the exception of Miss Hardcastle, a sensible, matter-of-fact girl, who cared little for outward attractions, and had refused Captain Godolphin's offer simply because she saw nothing admirable or praiseworthy in his character.

But as a rule Captain Godolphin might have taken Cæsar's celebrated motto for his own, with a slight variation,—“I came, I *was seen*, and I conquered.” Georgina walked straight into the snare laid for her, and prepared to

sacrifice her own happiness and self-respect for life, believing all the while that the gates of a terrestrial Paradise were opening before her, in the blind, reckless way that women have done, and will do, to the end of time. And Alice? Well, the days passed heavily enough for her, poor child. She was now fully awake to the fact that Captain Godolphin had ceased to care for her, if, indeed, he had ever cared at all; and the knowledge preyed upon her in a manner that those around little suspected. Still she never imagined that Georgina could have anything to do with the change.

How could she? She knew nothing of the clandestine walks and meetings connived at by the Italian governess, and there was no very perceptible alteration in Captain Godolphin's manner to Georgina in public.

One day Alice was driving with Mrs. L'Estrange in Piccadilly, and Captain Godolphin passed in a Hansom. Alice bowed; he raised his hat, and was gone in a moment; but not before Mrs. L'Estrange had noted the sudden rush of colour to her young friend's cheek, the momentary light in her eye, and all at once the truth burst on her mind. Alice

must be in love with Reginald Godolphin. How blindly stupid not to have seen it before! Another glance at Alice showed her that the girl's eyes were full of tears, and her cheeks flushed painfully. She had suffered much that morning; Captain Godolphin had ridden with them as usual, but had treated *her* with marked coldness and neglect. This chance meeting was the last straw that broke the camel's back of her endurance.

Mrs. L'Estrange was alarmed by her looks, and ordered the coachman to turn up Park Lane, and go home; and here she made Alice get out of the carriage, and rest in her quiet drawing-room, where they might enjoy an undisturbed chat. However, a sudden reserve came over the young girl, and she begged to be left quite alone for a short time. Mrs. L'Estrange left the room, promising to return in half an hour, and then Alice buried her face in the sofa cushions, and sobbed as if her heart would break. At that moment there rose before her a vision of the pleasant, shady little drawing-room at Southport; the murmuring of the waves, and Agnes's tranquil face, the ideal of all that was most peaceful and

happy on earth. Could it be possible that she had chosen to be *here*, in this hot, noisy, distracting London, when that calm home was open to receive her? Just then it seemed utter madness and folly; and Alice actually stretched out her arms in an agony of impatient, fruitless longing,—“Oh, Agnes, Agnes, take me home!”

But there was none to hear or answer, and in a few minutes the hysterical paroxysm passed away, she rose from the sofa, arranged her disordered dress, and was quietly standing by the window when Mrs. L'Estrange re-entered the room. She would reveal nothing to that kind friend, only saying, in answer to her anxious inquiries, that the heat had been too much for her, &c.; and Mrs. L'Estrange had no alternative but to send her home. She did so very reluctantly, and not before making many attempts to win Alice's confidence; but it was not to be won, so, as the next best thing to be done, the good lady sat down and wrote a long letter to Agnes, narrating all her fears and suspicions, which letter never reached its destination. There was some mistake in the direction, and it was returned to the writer a



fortnight afterwards. Had it ever been received, the whole aftercourse of Alice's life might have been changed. On such slight chances do the most serious events of life depend.

## CHAPTER VII.

Alas ! our young affections run to waste,  
Or water but the desert, whence arise  
But weeds of dark luxuriance, tares of haste,  
Rank at the core, though tempting to the eyes.

BYRON.

LIFE was not progressing much more smoothly in Southport than in London. Agnes was full of anxiety for her sister; for Alice's letters had become, like angel's visits, "few and far between"; and when they did arrive, they were short and unsatisfactory. Miss Fairfax sympathized deeply with the elder sister, who felt all the love and responsibility of a mother without having the authority requisite to put things straight. Over and over again had Agnes entreated her father to insist on Alice's return; but he received a letter from Lady Frances about this time vaguely hinting at a brilliant future in store for her niece if she were allowed to remain a few weeks longer

in town. So he refused to allow any interference with her Ladyship's arrangements.

Perhaps the most unhappy man in Southport at that time was Mr. Dalgetty. As long as he could satisfy himself that Alice was well and happy, he found it possible to reconcile himself to her temporary absence; but now that he heard rumours to the contrary, his anxiety became daily more insupportable. One day a letter arrived from an old college friend, asking him to come and spend a few days in London, before he started on a missionary tour to Western Africa. With the morbid conscientiousness which was a part of his character, Mr. Dalgetty doubted at first if he ought to go just because he wished it so much; but Miss Fairfax declared that he needed change; and at her instigation he decided on taking four days' holiday, and started for London the first day in August.

On the afternoon of his arrival he strolled into the Park, about five o'clock, with some vague hope of seeing Alice; and fortune favoured him, for he had not stood many minutes by the railings near Hyde Park Corner, when Lady Frances Lascelles's handsomely appointed car-

riage came in sight, and he recognized the fair face which had haunted his dream so incessantly for the last two months. Alice was looking ill—very ill, but more lovely than ever. He saw that at once; and as the carriage passed slowly by, he had full time to notice the tired look in the blue eyes, and the weary droop of the mouth—that never-failing index of a mind ill at ease. A little dressmaker's apprentice, who had paused for a moment in a long, hot walk, and was standing near him, raised her eyes with a longing, envious gaze to Lady Frances's carriage. As her eyes fell on the rich dress and lovely face of the young girl so close to her, she heaved a deep sigh, and doubtless thought bitterly of the great inequalities of fortune in this world. Ah! had she but known the weary weight of sorrow that apparently favoured child of fortune had to bear, she would have gone on her way with thankfulness instead of repining; for what a light trial is hard work and even poverty (bitter as they doubtless are) compared with failing health, disappointed affections, and a breaking heart! Some such thoughts as these passed through Mr. Dalgetty's mind as, having failed to catch Alice's eye, he

turned sadly away, and made his way back to his hotel.

Before resting that night he wrote a short note to Miss Fairfax, which that lady discreetly kept from Agnes, knowing that it would have no effect on Mr. Godolphin's decision, and fearing to add to the young girl's anxieties. It was on that same evening that the Lascelles were going to a "small and early" dance at Lady Eastcliffe's, and as the carriage passed down Piccadilly, Mr. Dalgetty caught sight of its occupants.

This time Alice saw him, she bent forward with a kind smile, and seemed as though she would have stopped the carriage; but Lady Frances evidently interfered to prevent it, and the opportunity was gone.

But in that moment Alice had seen how worn and anxious the young clergyman looked; and she said to her aunt,—“I suppose we had not time to stop, but did you notice how ill Mr. Dalgetty looks? I should like to have spoken to him.”

Lady Frances made some inaudible reply, the health of the Devonshire curate was of too little importance to her to delay her carriage

for five minutes ; and Constance said, — “ I always thought that man admired you, Alice ; doubtless that is the reason he has come up to town.”

“ I remember thinking him a very forward young man,” said Lady Frances, with a reproving glance at her daughter. “ This is the house ; take care of your dress, Alice, the wheel will soil it. Ah, there is Lord Danvers in the hall.” And she advanced with an air of cordiality which went far to make amends for Alice’s absent and pre-occupied manner.

In the course of the evening Alice was introduced to Lord Braughton, whose marriage with Constance was to take place in three days. He had been in London for some time, and had called occasionally in Lowndes Street, but Alice had hitherto missed seeing him. Her first impression was that the young man must be in a decline, and he certainly did look painfully delicate ; but he brightened up when he spoke, and appeared very gentle and intelligent. Constance looked happy and, consequently, very handsome, her dark, aristocratic features showing well in contrast with Alice’s fair beauty.

Lady Frances leant back in her comfortable

seat, and surveyed the whole party with much satisfaction. Lord Danvers's attentions to Alice were becoming daily more unmistakable; ever since Lady Eastcliffe's first dance he had singled her out as the object of his persistent and devoted attention. The only person who seemed wholly unconscious of this was Alice herself; and Lady Frances was well pleased that it should be so.

"No young man," she remarked to Constance, "is the worse for a little snubbing; and a judicious coolness on the lady's side is certain to produce an increase of warmth on the part of the gentleman. She will never be such a goose as to refuse him at last!"

At this ball Captain Godolphin appeared; and, to avoid singularity, asked Alice to give him a square dance. Ever afterwards the music of the "Lancers" and the old English airs introduced were associated in her mind with that miserable evening. He was cold and distant in his manner, and the few sentences he uttered were as set and conventional as those he might have addressed to Lady Frances. Once, when their hands touched in the dance, her eyes met his with a loving,

reproachful glance, which very nearly upset his resolution. To do him justice, Captain Godolphin was trying now to act in a straightforward way. He intended to show Alice by his manner that his former attentions to her had meant nothing, and he even made a meaning allusion to Lord Danvers, which brought the reproachful tears to her eyes.

He did not fail to notice the sad change which a few weeks' anxiety had brought in that beautiful face; and once in the course of that evening he asked himself seriously if it was worth while to sacrifice so much devoted affection for the sake of a few thousand pounds. But the thought was dismissed in a moment. He had gone too far to recede. Already he had told the most importunate of his creditors that his marriage with Miss Lascelles would probably take place within the next few weeks. (Had Georgina but known this!) If his marriage with Miss Godolphin was announced, they would be down upon him in a moment. There are some steps which can never be recalled, some sins which can never be atoned for. Such



was his past behaviour to Alice. It was not disappointed love alone which was making shipwreck of her happiness: wounded feeling and maidenly pride had much to do with it. "How could I have loved a man who never cared for me?" was the bitter, humiliating thought which haunted her day and night.

Lady Frances never perceived all this; so long as her niece was tolerably cheerful in society and well dressed, and did not absolutely decline Lord Danvers's attentions, she was content. What did it signify to her that every night her niece's pillow was wet with tears, that her bright spirits had fled, and that the sweet face grew paler and thinner day by day? Lady Frances was not absolutely heartless, but she was very worldly-minded, and would have smiled at the notion of a young lady breaking her heart for the sake of a scapegrace Captain, when she had an Earl with fifteen thousand a year at her feet, only waiting for an approving smile from her to make him the happiest of accepted lovers.

Lord Danvers was really and honestly very

much in love. In spite of a good deal of affectation and conceit, he was not a bad specimen of our young aristocracy, such as are to be seen by hundreds in our West-End drawing-rooms, or leaning over the Park railings in the season. He was not handsome, with his insignificant, freckled features and red hair; but that was not his fault; and there was a strong fund of good-nature and honourable feeling at the bottom of his character, which promised well for the happiness of the woman he should call wife. He thought Alice the loveliest girl he had ever seen; but she puzzled him amazingly—chiefly on account of the very small value she appeared to set on his attentions. Most young ladies in London were in a state of flutter and agitation if he danced twice in the same evening with any of them, or paid them the smallest and most ordinary compliment. But Alice always received him with the same gentle, indifferent manner, her colour never rose one whit higher, nor did her clear voice falter after the most enthusiastic speech from him. She was perfectly civil and kind always—no more.

Lord Danvers walked home that night with

his chief friend, Arthur Somers, from Lady Eastcliffe's dance, and he confided his sorrows and anxieties to him, asking for his opinion of the case. Young Somers was a good-hearted young fellow, very fond of giving his advice, and possessing a considerable knowledge of the world. On the present occasion he deliberately lit a cigar, then took his friend's arm, and put him through the following catechism:—

“Have you known her long?”

“About six weeks.”

“Seen much of her?”

“A good deal. Sometimes two or three times a day.”

“Too much by a great deal. Always make a woman look and long for your appearance; it is the only way to be appreciated. Any other admirer in the way?”

“I think not. I used to think young Godolphin—but that's all over now.”

“Does she always dance with you when you ask her, and readily accept all your civilities?”

“Always.”

“A bad sign. Is she pleasant and agreeable when you are together?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“Then, my dear fellow, I can give you very little hope. If you had told me she was rude, or sulky, or inclined to snub you, or in any other way intensely disagreeable, you would have had a better chance, in my opinion. A woman never treats the man she loves with half the civility she would show to an ordinary acquaintance. Odd thing, but characteristic of the sex.”

“Then your advice is—”

“Leave her alone, and hope for better luck next time. Good-night.” And young Oracle went off down St. James’s Street, humming some words of an old song,—

“If she be not fair for me,  
What care I how fair she be?”

And his Lordship went home feeling depressed, but by no means despairing.

The next two days passed rapidly away in the bustle and confusion that always precedes a wedding.

Constance was the only one of the party whom nothing seemed to ruffle or disturb. She gave orders with her usual calmness and

decision; and not till everything was arranged on the eve of the wedding-day, the last parcel received and inspected, the last trunk closed and directed to "Lady Braughton, Pavilion Hotel, Folkestone," did she retire to her room for an hour's repose. A few minutes afterwards a note arrived for her, and Alice took it up to her room. She knocked twice, and receiving no answer, she gently opened the door, and stood in amazement at the sight before her. Constance was kneeling by the bed, the proud head bent low, her face hidden in her hands, her whole form shaking with suppressed passionate sobs.

Alice's first impulse was to go to her, her next, to lay down the note quietly, and retire before she was seen. She guessed wisely that it would only have added another sting to that haughty spirit to know that its secret grief had been witnessed. But the sight had startled and grieved Alice beyond expression; and happening to meet Georgina on the stairs, she drew her aside, and inquired if any bad news had arrived to account for the sudden burst of grief on the part of the young bride.

A shade of anxiety crossed Georgie's merry face, and she said, thoughtfully,—“No, there has been no bad news. It is something new to see Constance in trouble. Do you know, Alice,” and she lowered her voice, “I doubt if she is really happy, in spite of her good spirits.”

“It was her own wish to marry Lord Braughton?”

“Oh, yes. But did you not know; a year ago she was very much attached to a Captain Grosvenor? Mamma did not like it, and he had no money; so she gave him up. But I do not think she has ever been quite the same since.”

“Do you think she loves him still?” exclaimed Alice.

“Hush, I can't tell. I only know, if it had been *me*,” and the speaker clenched her small white hand with a determination that promised well for Captain Godolphin's prospects, “no one, not even mamma, should have made me give up a man I loved.”

“And who loved you in return,” said Alice, with a mournful intonation, which made Georgina look up in surprise.

But at that moment Sir Hugh's voice was heard on the stairs, and the girls hurried away. In the evening, Constance came down, looking a shade paler than usual, but calm and self-possessed as ever.

The next day dawned bright and beautiful, and who then so handsome, so admired, so *envied* as the stately young bride? It all passed off well, as everything did which was managed by Lady Frances. All the arrangements were perfect; and it was the universal opinion that the appearance of the wedding group, as they stood under the painted window in St. Paul's Church, Knightsbridge, was picturesque and charming in the extreme.

So Constance Lascelles gave her hand and fortune to Lord Braughton; and if her heart did not follow the gifts, who was any the wiser? Not the young bridegroom; for hers was one of those thoroughbred natures which can suffer and *be still*; he may find her a little cold and unloving at times, no more. He will never know that in her gayest moments his wife's heart feels as if seared with a hot iron, and that the vision of a dark, kind, reproachful

face, which bid her farewell only ten months ago, will never cease to haunt her as long as she lives. No one guessed all this but Alice and Georgina, and they kept their own counsel.

In the course of the evening's festivities, Captain Godolphin found opportunity to whisper a few words to Georgina which brought the colour to her face in a flush of intense joy, and made her heart beat with that rapture which comes only once in a lifetime. And Captain Godolphin strolled away to his lodgings when all was over, a cigar between his lips, looking up at the deep-blue starlit sky, and thinking of just such another scene which had taken place five years before, when his heart *had* gone with the offer of his hand. Georgina was a nice little girl, and would have plenty of money, and they would be very happy together; but she was not the *right* one, the only one who had ever really touched a chord in his heart. No, the second love is never quite like the first. We try to believe that it is so, and call our new loves by the same endearing epithets, and, like Dickens's little girl, we "make-believe very much," but



it will not do. The lesson has been beautifully taught us once,—

“Time will teach thee soon the truth,  
There are no birds in last year’s nest.”

Sir Hugh Lascelles has hitherto played as subordinate a part in this story as he did, in reality, in his own house. He was a clever, unpractical man, devoted to politics and the affairs of “the House,” and troubling himself very little about domestic affairs. He placed implicit reliance on his wife’s judgment, and left the management of his family entirely to her. However, the day after Constance’s wedding his equanimity received a severe shock owing to the reception of a note from Captain Godolphin, very brief and to the point, stating that he had long been attached to Georgina, and asking permission to engage himself to her without delay.

Sir Hugh entered the drawing-room after luncheon with this missive in his hand, and found Lady Frances and Alice sitting over their work, recovering from the fatigues of the preceding day. The good gentleman dashed into the subject without preparation or delay.

“Here, my Lady,” he exclaimed, holding out the letter, “here’s a nice business. All owing to you having that young scapegrace here at all times and seasons. I thought you managed all this sort of thing, but, by George! I’ll look after my own affairs in future.”

Lady Frances’s cheek paled beneath her rouge as she read the note presented to her in this unceremonious fashion; and she glanced at Alice, and then at her husband, as if to implore silence. But Sir Hugh was not to be daunted or warned. “The fellow has not sixpence in the world,” he continued. “Of course he wants to marry that poor child for her money; but he shall never see a farthing of it.”

Lady Frances rose with an air of dignity. “We will discuss this question elsewhere, Sir Hugh. I will come to your study.” And she swept out of the room, followed by her husband.

As he passed Alice, she raised her eyes imploringly to his face, and asked,—“What is it, Uncle Hugh?”

“Well, I suppose you may know. It is an

offer for Georgina from that impertinent young scapegrace!"

"Who do you mean?"

"Who? why Reginald Godolphin, of course."

She strove to speak, but the words refused to come. Twice she tried to rise in vain, then the blood forsook her cheeks, Sir Hugh's face swam before her eyes, and she fell to the ground in a state of unconsciousness, from which they tried in vain to rouse her for many hours.

By this last act, Reginald Godolphin had destroyed that young life as surely as if he had struck a dagger home to her heart,—and how far less mercifully! Which is in reality the most cruel, the sportsman who shoots a bird on the wing, and brings it to the ground in a sudden, painless death, or the schoolboy who ruthlessly empties a nest, and carries it away, leaving the maimed and wounded fledgelings to pant out their lives in agony under the tree which sheltered them so kindly?

Some of us receive our death-blow early in life; but the wound may rankle and fester

for years before it kills. To such stricken ones, Death is a merciful and a happy thing—a boon to be desired, longed for, prayed for,—as the sick man longs for the morning that shall bring him relief,—as the mariner sighs for a sight of the land which means to him safety, happiness, and a home.

## CHAPTER VIII.

Life is a waste of wearisome hours,  
Which seldom the rose of enjoyment adorns,  
And the heart that is soonest awake to the flowers  
Is sure to be first to be touched by the thorns.

MOORE.

IN the somewhat trying circumstances in which she was now placed, Lady Frances acted with a dignity and tact truly commendable. She entirely ignored the too evident cause of Alice's sudden attack, attributing it to the heat of the weather and over-exertion at the time of the wedding. She could not prevent Sir Hugh from sending a very stern letter of reproof and dismissal to Captain Godolphin; but she softened the refusal in a private note of her own, in which she dwelt on Georgina's extreme youth, and the way in which they had all been taken by surprise, but by no means absolutely discouraging the young man's suit.

Her reason may easily be explained. There were rumours abroad of the sudden and severe

illness of old Sir Peter Godolphin; and if he were really to die, his nephew and successor might not be so very ineligible a *parti* for Georgina.

As for the young lady herself, Lady Frances told her that she was a foolish child, and had better attend to her French exercises and verbs instead of thinking of matrimony. Poor Georgie cried and fretted, and refused to be comforted in any way for about a week, when she suddenly recovered her spirits, much to her mother's joy, who little imagined that the young people had found out a way of correspondence through Madame Bettini, and that Reginald's passionately loving letters were the cause of her daughter's happy revival.

Of course Georgina selected Alice as her chief *confidante* next to the Italian governess; and a very kind and sympathizing friend she was, the proud instinct which is the birthright of most women coming to her aid, so that her cousin never suspected the agony caused by her artless confessions and disclosures.

But it all told upon her,—told sadly. Even Lady Frances at last remarked how pale and thin she was growing, and longed all the more

for the time when Lord Danvers should declare himself—a wealthy marriage being, in her opinion, sufficient consolation for most evils, whether of body or mind.

She had not long to wait. About ten days after Constance's marriage, a young man was sitting in a retired corner of his Club in St. James's Street, several sheets of closely-written note-paper lying before him, and an expression of considerable weariness and bewilderment on his countenance.

Suddenly the door swung open, and Mr. Somers entered. The first-named gentleman, who you will have guessed was Lord Danvers, looked up with an air of relief, and called out, "I say, Somers, come here for a minute, will you?" Mr. Somers advanced close to his side, and his Lordship continued,—“I am trying to write a letter, and I've got into a complete muddle. I'm blest if I haven't stuck here ever since eleven o'clock this morning, and I can't arrange the first sentence.”

Mr. Somers took up one of the numerous foul copies which littered the table, and a smile crossed his face as he read it. “You are a foolish fellow, Danvers,” was his first encourag-

ing remark. "I warn you that you will be refused."

"That is my business," said the other, irritably. "Will you help me or will you not?"

"Why don't you speak to the girl? It is always the best plan, especially as you don't appear to be fluent in composition."

A blush actually overspread his Lordship's freckled countenance.

"I can't do that," he said, hurriedly; "I would rather give up the whole thing. Look here, Somers, it's no use my trying the high-flown, romantic style; she's a sensible girl, and will see it's not natural. What do you think of a plain, business-like letter, just saying that I'm very much attached to her, and all that sort of thing, and that I hope she'll consent to be married at once, and not bother about a trousseau, and all that? We could start in a fortnight for Paris, and get her things much better there, and be back for the fag-end of the grouse-shooting. That'll do first-rate." And seizing a pen, he began to write like one inspired.

"Stop a bit," exclaimed Somers, looking



over his shoulder, "that won't do. You mustn't address her as 'Dear Alice.'"

"I thought it was the right thing under the circumstances."

"Certainly not; you can't be too respectful. Alter the fortnight into a month, and leave out about the grouse-shooting. She will think you mad."

"She will think right if I don't get this over soon," groaned Lord Danvers, as he took a fresh sheet. "I must give up the shooting, I suppose. Shall I say anything about settlements?"

"Good gracious! no."

"I suppose I must write a separate note to Sir Hugh? After all," and the young man's tone was almost pathetic in its utter hopelessness, "if she is persuaded into accepting me, it will only be for the sake of a title. She can't care for an ugly fellow like me. Hang it, Somers, I'd give a thousand a year for your good looks."

"Don't talk rubbish. Let me see how it reads now." And Mr. Somers took up the letter, and read, in a subdued tone,—

“ ‘ MY DEAR MISS GODOLPHIN,—

“ ‘ You must be aware that I have always admired you very much, and you are the only girl I care to marry in London. Will you consent to be mine, and accept a heart that is devoted to you ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Rather fine that,’ put in his Lordship. “ ‘ Sort of thing you see on a valentine, eh ? ’ ”

“ ‘ It is, rather,’ said Mr. Somers ; and continued reading :—

“ ‘ We can be married in a month, if you don’t object, go to Paris or somewhere for a fortnight, and be home before the last grouse is killed. Pray reply at once.

“ ‘ Ever yours, most truly,

“ ‘ DANVERS.

“ ‘ P.S.—Excuse blots. I can’t find a decent pen.’ ”

“ ‘ It is an original composition,’ observed Mr. Somers ; “ ‘ but I dare say it will do as well as anything else. I wish you had left out about the grouse.’ ”

“ ‘ Can’t be helped,’ was his Lordship’s reply.

“I shall have an attack of brain fever if I write another word. Come out and have a smoke.”

The important letter was duly sealed and directed, and was delivered in Lowndes Street on the afternoon of the same day, just as the ladies returned home from their drive in the Park. Lady Frances caught sight of the small coroneted note lying on the hall table, and, instantly divining its purport, she slipped it into her pocket, and went straight to her own room. By some ingenious process she then contrived to open the note, read it, and closed it again in so neat and dexterous a manner that the closest scrutiny would not have betrayed the fact that it had been opened. She then composed herself to a luxurious rest on the sofa, rang the bell, and desired that Miss Godolphin might be told to come to her after tea.

Alice came at once; and her first words opened the conversation in a somewhat unexpected manner. “I am so glad you sent for me, Aunt Frances,” she said; “I wanted to speak to you alone. I have just heard from Agnes; she wishes me to return home at

once. I think, if you will allow me, I will leave to-morrow."

She spoke hurriedly and a little nervously; but much to her surprise, and, perhaps, a little to her disappointment, Lady Frances did not seem at all annoyed. She only gave one of her sweet, languid smiles; and, pointing to the note which lay on the table, she said,—“Read that, dear child; it may alter your decision.”

Through her half-closed eyelids she watched her niece attentively as she read the young nobleman's effusion; she saw her expression change from surprise to amusement, and from amusement to indignation, and was not surprised when Alice looked up, her fair cheeks deeply flushed, as she exclaimed,—“He must be mad. I never gave him the least encouragement. Only listen, aunt,”—and she read the note aloud, and looked up, expecting to hear some expression of anger or surprise. She was disappointed.

“I think it is a very proper note,” observed Lady Frances, coldly. “He professes a sincere attachment to you, and does you the honour of requesting that you will become his wife. What more would you have?”

“Aunt Frances, you are not serious; you don’t suppose that I can accept him?” exclaimed Alice, in some agitation.

Lady Frances put her handkerchief to her eyes to dry the tears which most obstinately refused to flow. “Do as you like, ungrateful girl!” she murmured. “This is a cruel disappointment after all my labours. How I have longed and prayed for this happy event, and now it is evident my wishes are of no consequence to you. I have striven to act a mother’s part towards you, and this is my reward.”

“Dear Aunt Frances, I am so grieved; but what am I to do?” Genuine tears stood in Alice’s eyes.

“Take care, Alice,”—and her Ladyship removed her handkerchief from her eyes, and spoke severely,—“the world will assign only one reason for so mad an act as for you, a penniless girl, to refuse the greatest match of the season.”

“And that reason—”

“It will be said that you are in love with the man who has just declared his attachment to your cousin, Reginald Godolphin.”

The shaft was well aimed, and hit the mark.

But Alice was not yet vanquished. She went on, with a beating heart and trembling voice,—"No one need ever hear of it, Aunt Frances. Let me go home to-morrow, and I will send a note to Lord Danvers which will settle the question. He is too much of a gentleman to speak of it in the world; and, indeed," she added, with a touch of *naïveté*, "I think one may trust a man not to boast of his own rejection."

Lady Frances was growing tired of the discussion, and somewhat alarmed besides at the turn matters seemed to be taking. She reckoned on her niece's timid character, and determined to carry her point by a bold *coup de main*. "You are a foolish girl, Alice," said she, "but I will not allow you to sacrifice your prospects in this insane manner. Go and lie down in your room, and bathe those red eyes. Leave me to write to Lord Danvers."

"But you will not say—"

"I shall tell him that you are a good deal taken by surprise, and he must give you time to consider. You must remain with me till the end of the month, and I will hold myself responsible for you giving him a decided answer at the end of that time."

“But, Aunt Frances, it would not be straightforward; it would be giving him false hopes. I shall *never* marry him. Pray let me go home to-morrow.” And she fairly burst into tears.

Lady Frances looked up with an impatient gesture. “Don’t be a goose, Alice,” she said, sharply. “I have taken the affair out of your hands now. Go to your room; and for mercy’s sake don’t wear green to-night, you are as white as a ghost. No, not another word. I do not say you will be compelled to marry him, I only say *wait*.”

And Alice was forced to leave her aunt’s room and retire to her own, where she flung herself on the bed, and sobbed with a passionate despair of which few of those who knew her gentle nature would have deemed her capable.

Ah, Captain Godolphin, had you seen her then, it might have occurred even to your shallow, selfish mind that there are some games which are *not* worth the candle; and that it might have been as well to have paused earlier to consider the heavy price the girl would have to pay for a few hours of unheeding delirious happiness! Well, the pleasure is over now and the pain remains. The flower is plucked, the

ripe fruit eaten, and only the broken stem and the bitter rind remain to tell that they once lived and flourished !

After a few moments, a knock came at Alice's door. She did not answer, and a minute afterwards Georgina entered the room ; and catching sight of the golden head buried deep in the pillow, the slender frame convulsed with bitter sobs, she uttered an exclamation of dismay, and Alice raised her head.

Before very long Georgina had heard about her cousin's trouble as far as related to Lord Danvers ; and she expressed her indignation and sympathy in no measured terms. " It 's a horrid shame to bother you like this, darling," she exclaimed. " You are too good and sweet for any of them, and you shall not be teased. Why don't you go home ?"

" Oh ! if I only might. But Aunt Frances won't hear of it."

" Never mind. If she won't give you her permission, go without it. This is a free country. ' Britons never, never shall be slaves.' "

" Oh, hush, Georgie, don't sing. Tell me what you mean." And Alice looked up with renewed hope in her eyes.



Georgina suddenly jumped off the bed, where she had been sitting with her legs crossed in Oriental fashion, and, flying downstairs, she presently re-appeared with a beaming countenance and 'Bradshaw' under her arm. "Look here, darling," said she; "it can easily be managed. A train leaves for Southport at 6.10 in the morning. No one is up in the house at that hour but me. I can manage to open the house door, though it is rather a tiresome lock. You shall walk to the end of the square, pick up a cab, drive to the station, and you will be safe at home by two o'clock. I am sure I am giving disinterested advice, Alice, for what I shall do without you I don't know and can't think. Have you enough money?"

"I have nearly five pounds."

"Oh, that will do. Don't bother about packing; we will send all your things after you. Oh, there's mamma calling. I thought I was safe for ten minutes." And she was obliged to hurry off, leaving Alice much cheered by her ready, loving sympathy, though somewhat in doubt as to the correctness of her advice.

The longer she thought over the whole

matter, the more puzzled she felt. It seemed a poor return for all Lady Frances's real kindness, to steal away from her house in the early morning as if she were escaping from prison. Every feeling of gratitude and propriety revolted at the idea. And yet how could she remain to be lectured, coaxed, or scolded into engaging herself to Lord Danvers? for Alice knew enough of her own yielding nature to feel pretty sure that Lady Frances would not fail to carry her point if allowed time and opportunity. Under no circumstances would she have been likely to fall in love with the good-hearted but uninteresting young nobleman; but *now*, with Reginald Godolphin's voice still sounding in her ears, his remembrance fresh in her loving memory, it was impossible indeed.

In her wild, girlish romance she felt as if death itself would be preferable to such profanation as that. Still it was due to Lady Frances to give her some warning; and she hastily penned a few pencil lines, which she gave to her aunt's maid to be delivered without delay to her mistress. The answer came in a few minutes. It was as follows:—

“You must remain with me till the end of the month. Do not continue to dispute this point: I have settled it. Some day you will acknowledge that I have been your best friend.

“F. E. L.”

After this Alice hesitated no longer. She made up her mind to follow Georgina's advice, and went down to dinner with heightened colour and eyes that sparkled with joy at the thought of the freedom and peace she hoped to attain on the morrow.

Lady Frances saw her niece tolerably composed and cheerful, and was satisfied. She had privately informed Sir Hugh of 'Alice's "brilliant prospects," and he was unusually kind and attentive in his manner, so that the evening passed off very pleasantly.

But the effort to keep up and appear natural was too much for Alice, and she went to bed with a violent headache, the misery of which was much increased by the teasing, hacking cough that never left her now. Under these circumstances, it was scarcely a pleasure to hear Georgina's knock at her bed-room door,

and to see that young lady enter in a scarlet dressing-jacket, and a radiant expression of countenance, evidently prepared for a long chat.

“What do you think, Alice?” she exclaimed. “I have just had a note from Reginald, and he says old Sir Peter is very ill; he has had a fit or something, and there are serious doubts of his recovery. Oh, I shall go wild with joy!”

Alice, who was arranging her hair for the night, let the whole mass of golden curls fall over and hide her face on the side nearest to Georgina, as she replied, in a low voice,—“Poor old man! his illness ought not to be made a cause for rejoicing, Georgina, even by you.”

“Now, Alice, that is unreasonable. How can I feel anything but glad when I never even saw the old man in my life, and when his death will remove the only obstacle to our marriage?”

“Is it the only obstacle? I thought your father—”

“Oh, of course he’ll make a fuss about my being so young; but that’s all nonsense; I shall be eighteen in October. Oh, Alice, don’t

you think I am to be envied ? The handsomest and nicest man in England for a husband, and with rank and wealth besides, I shall have nothing else to wish for."

"No, you ought to be very happy. Many would envy you."

"But don't *you* ?" repeated Georgina, persistently, kneeling down by her cousin's side, and trying to see her face through the thick veil of hair. "Confess, Alice ; don't you wish you were going to be married to a man like my Reginald ?"

"I can't tell, Georgina ; most likely I shall never marry. A poor man's daughter" (Alice spoke with irrepressible bitterness) "cannot offer any attraction to a man like Captain Godolphin."

"That is as much as saying that Reginald is marrying me for my fortune, Alice," spoke Georgina, angrily ; "and that is absurd : he will be nearly as well off as papa when Sir Peter dies. Oh, Alice" (and the volatile young lady started off on a fresh tack), "how I shall miss you ! I shall have no one to talk to about Reginald when you are gone. Have you really quite decided ?"

"Yes, I have, indeed. Now I have begun to think seriously about it, I am longing for home."

"Let me brush your hair, darling, for the last time,"—and Georgina sprang up, and, seizing one of the ivory brushes, began to smooth the fair shining tresses. "Oh, Alice," she exclaimed, as she held up one long curl and let it fall in a golden shower over her fingers, "how foolish it is of you to say you will never marry. I heard Reginald say once, long ago, that you are the handsomest girl in town. Do you know, darling, I was once absurd enough to feel a little jealous of you?"

"You had no reason."

"No, of course not. But I do wonder he never fell in love with you. Perhaps it was because you never cared for him."

Alice rose hastily, and almost wrenched the brush from her cousin's hand.

"Are you tired, dear?" said Georgina, surprised.

"My head aches, and I shall have a journey to-morrow. One word, Georgie. If Sir Peter dies, shall you be married at once?"

“Oh, yes; Reginald would not consent to wait then, nor should I.”

“Of course not. Thank you, dear; good-night,”—and Alice went to bed with the thankful conviction that if she had not already made up her mind to leave town on the morrow, this news would have decided her.

## CHAPTER IX.

Love that hath us in the net,  
Can he pass and we forget?  
Many a chance the years beget, even so.  
Eyes with idle tears are wet,  
Idle habit links us yet.  
What is love? for we forget. Ah! no, no.  
TENNYSON.

THE next morning dawned, damp, chilly, and miserable. At five o'clock Georgina was helping Alice to dress, doing nearly everything for her, for the excitement of the previous night had passed away, leaving her nervous and depressed. Georgina was the best person possible for an occasion of this sort. She was strong-minded and self-possessed herself, and had no pity for weak-minded people, or the slightest sympathy with "nerves."

By dint of her energy and quickness, everything was ready in time, and the two girls stole down to the hall-door, which was cau-



tiously unbarred by Georgina ; and they took leave of each other with beating hearts and tearful eyes.

“I shall watch for an hour,” whispered Georgina ; “if you don’t return before that, I shall know you have got off safely, and nothing has gone wrong.”

The door closed gently, and Alice was standing in the cold street, which looked strangely misty and unreal in the early morning light. The wind blew sharply, and she wrapped the warm shawl round her which her cousin’s forethought had provided, as she walked quickly to the end of Lowndes Square, hailed a cab, and in a few minutes found herself safely at the station.

It all seemed like a dream, and a very unpleasant one. She gave the cabman in her haste half-a-sovereign instead of half-a-crown ; and he stood looking after her in some perplexity, muttering that “it was a queer start, and he shouldn’t wonder if the young party turned up at Gretna Green.”

She had twenty minutes to spare before the train started, so Alice walked up the platform, looking for the entrance to the first-

class waiting-room. She was quite unused to travelling alone, and in sheer bewilderment of mind she passed the door twice. The third time she saw the notice, and was just about to enter, when, to her horror, a gentleman walked straight up to her, and she recognized Major Bartram. The colour forsook her cheeks, and she gazed at him with a terror-stricken expression, that added to his very natural amazement.

“Miss Godolphin,” he exclaimed, “are you going to travel alone at this hour?”

She managed to gasp out that she was going home to her father’s house in Devonshire.

“Lady Frances should not have sent you alone,” he said, gravely, seeing her white cheeks. Then, catching sight of her expression, he feared he had been impertinent, and added, hastily,—“Can I be of any use? Where is your luggage?”

“I have none,” she said, faintly; “at least, it is to be sent after me.”

“I am going to Southport also,” returned the Major, after a short pause of astonishment. “I am going to try and secure the same lodgings for my mother that she had last year; I hope to return to town this evening. Ah,

the ticket-office is open at last, — shall I get yours for you ? ”

Alice sought in her pocket to find her purse, but she sought in vain. To her dismay, it was not to be found. It might have been stolen from her on the platform, or she might have dropped it herself in her hurry and agitation of mind. At any rate it was gone, and she was quite penniless.

This stroke of ill luck was too much for her sorely-tried nerves, and, bursting into tears, she forgot that she had a listener, and sobbed aloud,—“ Oh, I wish I was at home—I wish I had never run away ! ”

“ Run away ! ” The words fell on the Major’s ear, and Alice caught his look of astonishment and horror, and knew that she had betrayed herself. It was a trying situation for a young man, and all might not have acted with the good sense and tact which Major Bartram now displayed. There was only one right course before him, and he took it without hesitation.

Taking Alice’s unresisting arm in his, he took her, not to the ticket-office, but to the waiting-room, which was, fortunately, tenanted

only by one old woman and a Sister of Mercy. Here he placed her in a chair, and waited patiently till the passionate storm of sobs had a little subsided.

Then she looked up imploringly. "Pray get the tickets, Major Bartram; we shall be late."

He answered gently,—“Surely you are not in a fit state to travel, Miss Godolphin? You must go home to your aunt’s house, and doubtless she will see that you are sent to Devonshire to-morrow under proper protection.”

The grave, soothing tone had the effect of calming her extreme agitation, but her voice trembled as she murmured,—“I cannot return to Aunt Frances; I can never see her again after this. Oh, if I only had not lost my purse!”

“Will you tell me how you managed to leave home this morning unseen?” asked the Major, glancing at the clock, which told him there was but five minutes to spare before the train started.

Alice told him all the circumstances, of course entirely suppressing the motives that had led to her leaving her aunt’s house. He

listened attentively, occasionally asking a question, and so wiling away the time till a bell sounded, and soon after a succession of shrill whistles announced that the train was fairly off. Alice started from her seat, with an exclamation of dismay.

“What shall we do?” she exclaimed. “I thought we had quite ten minutes to spare.”

“Never mind,” answered the Major, coolly; “I will see you home now.” And before the astonished girl could offer an objection, he had hailed a cab, handed her in, and they were driving rapidly back to Lowndes Street.

It was a short, silent drive. Major Bartram watched his companion with considerable anxiety, for she looked so white, that he expected her to faint every moment. However, they reached the street without any accident, and alighted a few doors from Lady Frances’s house.

“You will probably find Miss Lascelles waiting,” said the Major; “I will watch to see if you get in safely.”

These words were probably intended as a caution in case the young lady should meditate a second escape; but they were un-

necessary. Alice's courage had forsaken her, and in spite of her sore disappointment, she felt almost grateful to the Major.

"You have missed your train on my account," she said, with her eyes full of tears, as he shook hands and wished her good-bye.

"It is of no consequence; I can go by the 11.40. Good-bye, Miss Godolphin; I trust you will get in unobserved, and this little adventure *will never be known.*"

She felt the kindness of those last words, when, five minutes later, she was lying on the sofa in her own little room, the faithful Georgina kneeling by her side, while she told the whole eventful history.

"I know he will never tell anybody," she said, in conclusion. "I cannot think how I came to be so foolish. I felt like a runaway school-boy when Major Bartram looked at me with those calm dark eyes of his, not the least contemptuous, but so surprised and sorrowful."

"I think he is a bold, interfering wretch!" was the other young lady's verdict. "He ought to have lent you the money for your fare, and said no more about it. You look dreadfully tired, Alice; and how you are

coughing. It is scarcely seven o'clock; I will leave you to rest till a quarter to nine; that will give you plenty of time to dress."

And she left the room, in spite of Alice's remonstrances. She seemed to dread being left alone; however, when Georgina visited her again, two hours later, there was no doubt as to the impossibility of her coming down stairs. She had evidently caught a violent chill, and so seriously increased the cold which had been hanging about her for weeks; her eyes were bright with fever, and she coughed incessantly, complaining also of a sharp pain in her chest.

Even Georgina's inexperience could not blind her to the fact that her cousin was probably going to be very ill, and she insisted on Alice going to bed, drew down the blinds, in the hope that sleep might visit the restless blue eyes, and went downstairs to tell her mother.

About an hour afterwards her Ladyship made her appearance, and one glance at her niece told her that Georgina had not been deceived as to the serious nature of her illness. She was in the main a good-hearted woman,

and there was real concern and pity in the tone in which she said,—“This is a very sudden illness, Alice ; how could you have caught such a bad cold ? My dear child, how you are coughing ; I must send for Dr. Long at once. Have you much pain in your chest ? Ah, I thought so ; don’t try to talk. I will send you some hot coffee ; you seem quite chilled.”

And she was rustling from the room, when Alice caught her hand. The few words of kindness had gone straight to her heart, and she suddenly determined to make a full confession.

“Aunt Frances,” she almost gasped, “I must tell you—it is all my own fault—I have been very wrong—I went out this morning—I—I—tried to run away !”

“To run away !” Lady Frances stood motionless, too startled and horrified to utter more than that one exclamation. Then it struck her that Alice must be delirious ; and, taking the hot little hand in hers, she said some kind words in a low, soothing tone.

Some girls might have taken advantage of the mistake and said no more ; but with all her faults and weaknesses, Alice was, *as a rule*,



truthfulness itself. She raised herself in bed, and not without much difficulty and many tears told the whole of her extraordinary story in so simple and straightforward a manner, that there could be no doubt of its truth.

Lady Frances dropped the hand which she had continued to hold, and walked to the window, where she stood silent for some minutes with her back to Alice. Was she trying to subdue her anger? or did some latent pang of self-reproach touch that worldly heart at the thought of the insupportable misery which must have racked the heart of that timid young girl before she decided on such a step as this?

We cannot tell; but when, at last, she turned round and walked to Alice's bed-side there was no anger in the tone in which she spoke. "This house is not a prison, Alice; you shall not be kept here against your will. You are too ill to be moved at present (you must see that yourself); but as soon as the doctor gives leave, you shall be sent home under proper care." And she left the room before Alice could reply.

It would have been a hard heart indeed that

could have nourished any resentment against her now. An acute inflammation of the lungs came on with appalling quickness, and tried the delicate frame almost beyond its strength. All that medical science and the kindest and most experienced nursing could do for her was done.

Mrs. L'Estrange and Georgina scarcely left her day or night. Even old Sir Hugh spared a few minutes to visit her room twice each day, and would gaze sorrowfully at the fair, unconscious face as it lay on the pillow, still "beautiful exceedingly," in spite of the wasted outline and the hectic flush which burned there in place of the soft rosy bloom that would return no more.

For many days her young life hung in the balance; but Science and Youth are strong foes, and they battled with the mighty giant Death, and prevailed at last. At the end of the fifth week after Alice was taken ill she was pronounced to be out of danger.

It was a lovely day in the middle of September. Mrs. L'Estrange was sitting with her, and had told her the doctor's verdict with a happy, encouraging smile, though her cheeks

were wet with tears. But there was no answering gleam of joy in Alice's blue eyes; only a little colour came into her cheek, and she said, wearily,—“You have been very good to me, dear Mrs. L'Estrange; how can I ever thank you?”

“You will thank me best, my dear, by getting well very quickly. Your voice sounds quite natural to-day; we must have you up and dressed to-morrow, and all this pretty hair plaited as usual.”

“I feel nearly well to-day,” answered Alice, “only so very tired of lying down. If I might sit up for a little in the arm-chair, it would be such a rest and change for me.”

Mrs. L'Estrange looked doubtful, but the nurse decided that if Miss Godolphin fancied to sit up, it would do her more good than keeping her in bed against her will; and so it came to pass that when Georgina paid her mid-day visit, she found Alice up and partly dressed, looking like a child in her scarlet shawl, the fair curls falling on her shoulders, for she could not bear to have her head touched.

Lady Frances came upstairs full of congratulations, and decided, with much inward satisfaction, that her illness had not materially

injured her niece's good looks. If she had lost her round, rosy beauty, her face had gained in depth and earnestness of expression; and there was a mournful, dreamy look in the large, soft eyes, which Lady Frances could not at all understand, but thought extremely interesting and becoming.

"She will be able to see Lord Danvers next week," her Ladyship remarked to Sir Hugh as they left Alice's room and went downstairs; "the poor young man has called twice every day to inquire, and it is really time his suspense was ended."

On this same day, Captain Godolphin was sitting in his lodgings in St. James's Street, a telegram lying open on the table before him, the contents of which would have filled him with joy a few weeks before; yet there is a weary, hopeless look on his face as he reads the few words over and over again, as if scarcely able to take in their meaning. Yet they are very simple:—

"HENRY ANDREWS TO SIR REGINALD GODOLPHIN.

"Your uncle, Sir Peter, died at four o'clock this morning. Come at once."

Captain Godolphin—we beg his pardon, Sir Reginald—rose at last, and pushed the paper from him with an impatient gesture.

Ah, it was of little worth to him now! Had he but waited two short months, how different it all might have been. He might have married Alice Godolphin, and had “the fairest and most loving” wife in London; he would have redeemed the stain on his honour, and retained the friendship of Major Bartram.

Well, it was useless to think now of those saddest words in the English language, “*what might have been.*” Poor little Georgie was very fond of him now, and it was too late to retract.

So he sat down with a heavy heart, and wrote the few lines which would carry joy to Georgina’s heart, and free Lady Frances from all anxiety as to her daughter’s prospects in life.

The note arrived in the evening. Sir Hugh and his wife had a consultation in the library, the result of which was that a note was despatched to Sir Reginald, and Georgina was sent for, and informed that if her feelings were

unchanged, she was now free to look upon him as her future husband.

Happy Georgie! In her first impulse of joyful gratitude she actually jumped up and threw her arms round her mother's neck in a loving embrace, which greatly surprised that lady, who was not accustomed to such affectionate demonstrations on the part of her family.

Sir Hugh, whose many scruples had given his wife much trouble to overcome, heaved a sigh as Georgina left the room, and muttered that she was a wild young thing, and that it was a foolish affair.

But Lady Frances would not hear of any withdrawal or re-consideration of the question. If it had been Constance's affair, she might have hesitated; but Georgie had always been her favourite daughter, and what Lady Eastcliffe called her "infatuation" for Reginald Godolphin had revived in full force; so that she actually looked forward with joy to the time when he should be again an authorized *habitué* of the house.

Mrs. L'Estrange, who had been almost domiciled in the house since Alice's illness, now

received a covert hint from Lady Frances that her presence was no longer needed or desired ; so that she at last prepared to take leave of her patient, though with much reluctance and heavy forebodings.

“ It has been kind of your aunt to allow me to be here so much,” she said to Alice, on the evening that the news came from Sir Reginald Godolphin. “ I must be leaving London in a few days, and I wish I could propose taking you with me ; but I know it is of no use to ask it. You must take every care of yourself, dear child. Remember, you are far from strong.”

Alice promised, and took leave of her kind friend with many tears.

During the whole of her long illness she had never once spoken of Captain Godolphin ; even in delirium his name had never passed her lips ; so Mrs. L'Estrange left in the full persuasion that the unfortunate affair had been forgotten, or had, indeed, been only the creation of her own imagination. Still when she met Georgina on the stairs in the wildest spirits, and eager to tell her joyful news to Alice, she stopped and begged

her to be careful, and avoid any excitement.

"I suppose," she added, with a smile, "it would be too much to expect that you should defer your communication for a few days?"

"Oh!" cried Georgina, a world of disappointment in the tone, "it can't do Alice any harm. Joy never kills; and she will be so glad to hear all is settled at last."

There was no valid objection to make, and, fearful of rousing suspicion, Mrs. L'Estrange had no resource but to allow her to pass on.

The disclosure did no harm after all. The real shock had been weeks ago, when Alice first learnt the treachery of the man she loved so well. She listened quietly enough now, even with an occasional smile, as Georgina poured forth all her hopes and plans.

But an unexpected trial was in store for her. Sir Reginald was now installed in his old position as an "*ami de la maison*." His marriage was to take place in six weeks, and he was always with Georgina, riding, driving, or chatting together in Lady Frances's little morning-room.

Her Ladyship meanwhile grumbled dread-



fully at the heat and the general emptiness and desolation of London. They had never stayed so late in town before ; but Alice's illness, and now Georgina's engagement and the arrangements for her marriage, had rendered it necessary. However, it was now settled that Alice should go home on the 1st of October ; and on the 2nd the whole Lascelles family, including Sir Reginald, were to migrate to Ryde till a week before the wedding-day.

Still Lady Frances hoped to accomplish Alice's engagement with Lord Danvers before she left town, and it was a cherished vision of hers that the double wedding should take place from her house. She deemed it well not to worry her niece with constantly pleading Lord Danvers's cause ; but she occasionally let fall an observation which was intended to show that she considered the affair by no means at an end, and electrified Alice one afternoon by walking into her room with the announcement that her rejected suitor was waiting downstairs in the morning-room, and wished to speak to her.

Alice looked up in amazement. "Aunt Frances," she exclaimed, "I gave my answer

long ago. You have not been keeping him in suspense all these weeks?"

Lady Frances would not listen. She continued to hold the door open, and said, with a smile,—“Hush, my dear, don't talk nonsense. You must at least hear what he has to say for himself; he has been a very patient and constant adorer.”

And Alice found herself obliged to leave her room, feeling desperate and angry, and full of resentment against her aunt for placing her in so false and unpleasant a position. At the turn of the stairs she came upon Reginald Godolphin.

Alice had hitherto made her extreme weakness and delicacy a reason for remaining in her room the greater part of the day, so had escaped seeing him till this moment, in spite of his daily visits to the house; but now they met face to face, and she flushed crimson with dismay and annoyance at such a meeting at such a time.

He shook hands with her, and immediately asked Lady Frances whether he should find Georgina in the morning-room as usual.

“Not to-day,” was her hurried answer,

“Lord Danvers is waiting there. Make haste, Alice, he will think I have forgotten to tell you.”

A look of intelligence passed between Sir Reginald and his intended mother-in-law, and, as he passed up the stairs, he turned and glanced at Alice, who still stood irresolute—a look half-amazed, half-annoyed, and wholly contemptuous.

Unreasonable, undeserved, as that look was, it cut her to the heart. That dangerous crimson again flushed her cheek, and she passed on quickly.

Had Sir Reginald waited a moment, he would have seen her footsteps falter as she reached the landing; and, with her hand on the door, she stood for a moment as one in pain, the flushed cheek changing to a deadly white, and then fell to the ground with a short, sharp cry. He heard that, and rushed downstairs, followed by Lady Frances; but when he had raised her light form from the ground, the golden head lay heavy on his arm, and the white dress was all streaked and stained with blood.

## CHAPTER X.

Yet e'en the greatest griefs may be reliefs,  
Could we but take them right, and in their ways.  
Happy is he whose heart hath found the art  
To turn his double pains to double praise.

G. HERBERT.

A SMALL blood-vessel had broken, owing to injudicious excitement and over-exertion after a severe illness. It was quite an exceptional circumstance, and was not likely to occur again. So said the doctors; and it appeared as if their favourable verdict was about to prove correct. Alice soon rallied after her alarming attack, and, after a few days' quiet, was able to return to Southport on the day which had been originally fixed.

The parting was a cold one between Lady Frances and her niece. Her Ladyship felt much aggrieved at the utter failure of all her cherished hopes and expectations; for Alice's

first act on her recovery had been to write a decisive note to Lord Danvers, declining his offer in a manner which could not be mistaken.

Alice, on the other hand, felt that she had been tyrannized over, and all but forced into marriage with a man for whom she scarcely entertained a friendly feeling. Georgina honestly regretted the parting with her cousin, but her thoughts were naturally much occupied with "dear Reginald," and she looked forward to a meeting in November.

After all the heat, turmoil, and noise of the London season, the little town of Southport looked refreshingly cool and still to Alice's wearied eyes when she reached the 'end of her journey. Agnes was terribly shocked by the change in her sister's appearance. Lady Frances's accounts of her illness had always fallen far short of the reality; even at the worst she had never admitted that Alice had more than a severe cold; so that those at home were quite unprepared to see her so altered, with nothing so plainly written on her face as consumption.

So thought Agnes and Miss Fairfax. Even

Mr. Godolphin was roused to something like apprehension on his daughter's account, and would turn his face to the wall after her daily visit, muttering,—“So like her mother,—so like her mother.”

Indeed, Lady Mary's picture might now have passed for a likeness of Alice herself. The features had always been similar, and the expression was now almost the same—an expression suitable enough to the worn, delicate face of a middle-aged lady, but which sat strangely on the bright girlish features of a girl of nineteen. Miss Fairfax noted this alteration with much pain, and her manner towards her young friend underwent a complete change.

Entirely dropping the acerbity and sarcasm which had once rendered her frequent presence a very doubtful pleasure, she was now ever gentle and kind, and would sit with Alice for hours reading, talking, and trying to vary the monotony of those autumn days, which often seemed very tedious to the invalid, for she could do so little. No more wanderings by the sea-shore, or country walks in the fine cool evenings. Although not absolutely ill, her

strength did not return, and the least exertion brought on a distressing cough, and that bright, unhealthy flush, which Agnes had learnt to watch for and dread.

Mr. Dalgetty called soon after her return from town. It was a trying visit for him. He talked the whole time to Agnes, scarcely daring to glance at the sofa where Alice lay, and only preserving outward composure by the strongest effort of will. His was not a sanguine nature; he dared not entertain the least hope that she would recover; and though he had never deemed it possible that she would think of him in any other light than that of a kind and useful friend, it was none the less a bitter trial to him to know that the day was not far off when he should see that beautiful face no more.

He was very much altered. The hot fires of affliction may blight and destroy some feeble affections, but the nobler ones are refined and purified by them.

The poor found Mr. Dalgetty a kinder and more sympathizing friend than of old: he was less keen to note their faults, more lenient to the follies and weaknesses of human nature.

The peremptory, dictatorial manner, which had made him feared, and even disliked, was altered now; he had grown strangely gentle and quiet, and his parishioners rejoiced in the change. Zeal and unselfishness had always been distinguishing points in his character, and to these were now added patience and a loving, gentle charity, which used not to be his.

Only Miss Fairfax possessed the secret which was the cause of the alteration in the young clergyman; and she kept silence faithfully, only grieving to mark how each day his pale face grew paler and thinner, while the tall form became so slight and delicate-looking, as almost to suggest the idea of some wasting disease. Such was not, however, the fact. The hardy northern constitution was not so easily undermined, and Mr. Dalgetty had many years of probable strength and usefulness before him, as he sometimes pictured to himself, with a weary sigh.

Altogether it was a sad autumn at Southport. Agnes soon found out that something preyed on her sister's mind, and retarded the recovery which the doctors still declared was possible, and even probable. But with a



tact which is as rare as it is loving and considerate, she forbore to ask questions; and Alice never broke the silence, but lived on in a dreamy world of her own—one cherished name always in her mind, though never on her lips.

The Bartrams were settled for the winter at Southport, and proved a great comfort to the Godolphin family. Mrs. Bartram was a motherly, tender-hearted woman, full of compassion for the young invalid, and sympathy for the sorely tried elder sister. Miss Fairfax declared herself quite jealous of the long visits paid by the Major and his mother, and of the warm friendship which was rapidly springing up between that lady and Agnes.

Mrs. Bartram's was a nature keenly to appreciate Agnes's peculiarly quiet, unselfish, practical turn of mind; and Agnes soon learnt to cling affectionately to the first really kind sensible adviser she had had since her mother's death, with the exception of good Miss Fairfax, who could never have possessed a particle of the refinement and tact which made Mrs. Bartram's friendship so valuable.

All her sympathy and kindness, however,

failed to win Alice's confidence, though, acting on a hint from her son, she never lost an opportunity of a private chat, in which she often came very near the discovery of the secret which was destroying the hope and vigour of that young life. But Alice would not reveal to a comparative stranger, however motherly and kind she might be, the secret which was hidden from her own sister; and so the wound remained unprobed, unhealed, and grew deeper and more incurable day by day.

It was a different scene at Ryde. Sir Reginald behaved himself, on the whole, as an attentive lover should, always keeping in mind that he did not bear his youthful betrothed any great amount of affection. But he had never found it a difficult task to pay devoted attention to a pretty girl—for a time, at any rate;—and then Georgina loved him, oh, how dearly! She showed her love, too, in a thousand pretty, affectionate ways. It was not her fault if occasionally a fairer face than hers, with blue, reproachful eyes, would rise between her and Sir Reginald, till his thoughts wandered far away, and he forgot to pay her the attention that was her proper due.

It was not till they had been at Ryde nearly a week that he made any allusion to Alice. He was sitting with Georgina late in the evening on the beach, watching the distant lights across the water, as they trembled into life one by one. They had been silent for some moments, when he said, with a studied carelessness of tone,—“By-the-bye, when is your cousin Alice to be married? It will be soon, I suppose, as she is so much better?”

“Married!” exclaimed Georgina, with astonishment. “Did you not know that was all nonsense? It was just one of mamma’s fancies. Alice never cared for Lord Danvers.”

“Very likely not; but many girls would hesitate to refuse a man of his wealth and position.”

“Not Alice,” was the warm answer. “She will never marry unless she really loves. Do you know, Reginald, I sometimes think she must have had some disappointment this season, she changed so much latterly, and lost her spirits as well as her health? Did you ever hear of anything? you were always about with her.”

Had Sir Reginald heard? At any rate, he

did not answer, and his eyes had a dreamy, far-off look in them, as though he was absorbed in thought or some remembrance. Georgina touched his arm, and said, impatiently,—“I wish you would pay more attention, Reginald; your thoughts are always wandering, especially when I talk about Alice. You might take a little more interest in my friends.”

He looked round then, and laid his hand kindly on hers.

“You are always talking about Alice,” he said, with a smile. “I would much rather we talked about you and your affairs.”

But for once the loved voice tried in vain to soothe. Georgina was thoroughly put out, more so, indeed, than was warranted by the offence, and she rose to go home, observing that the evening papers would probably prove more interesting than her conversation. Sir Reginald made no reply, and they walked home in silence.

After this conversation, an intense and most unreasonable longing took possession of Sir Reginald’s mind to see Alice Godolphin once more before his marriage.

There are some strong impulses which it is

almost impossible to account for, and this was one of them. He was not in love with Alice, and he certainly had no intention of breaking his engagement with Georgina, and yet he felt as if he would give the whole world to see that sweet face once more, with those deep, mournful eyes, which haunted him day and night.

He had never thought so much of Alice as now, when he was about to separate himself from her for ever, and honour and duty required of him that he should forget her. Sir Reginald had hitherto never denied himself the smallest personal gratification, and he did not long withstand this temptation. It could be easily managed.

Among the numerous important purchases which the young Baronet had made since his accession to the property, was a beautiful little yacht, which he had named the "Lady Frances," and which was now lying at anchor off Ryde. It was a very natural thing to propose that they should all take a short excursion round the south of England, occasionally landing to inspect any place of peculiar interest or beauty. They need not be absent

longer than a fortnight or three weeks, and it would certainly be a more novel and amusing way of spending their time than remaining stationary at Ryde.

Georgina was enchanted with the idea, but she had some difficulty in persuading her mother to consent to it. With a reluctance which she afterwards looked upon as something prophetic, Lady Frances objected, argued, and debated, till Sir Reginald was almost tempted to give up the notion in despair.

But Georgina persevered, and gave her mother no peace between alternate grumbling and entreaty, till she gave her consent to the expedition. The "Lady Frances" was fitted up with a style and magnificence which did honour to her owner's taste, and the party found themselves lodged as comfortably and more luxuriously than in their own Belgravian homes.

Lady Frances established herself in the state-cabin, and gazed around her with an air of placid contentment, while the lovers paced the upper deck, made friends with the sailors, and inspected every nook and cranny of the beautiful little vessel. Sir Hugh saw them off with

many dismal sighs and prognostications of evil. Nothing would have induced him to trust himself under Sir Reginald's care at sea; and they got on remarkably well without him.

So it came to pass that about ten days afterwards Agnes Godolphin was startled by an apparition in blue-serge costume and sailor hat, which proved to be Georgie herself, full of descriptions of the delicious voyage they had had, and wild with delight at the easy, congenial life she was leading, and the prospect of again seeing her darling Alice. Lady Frances had remained on board the yacht, but had sent a request that her nieces would honour her with a visit.

"I will tell Alice you are here," said Agnes, when she had recovered from her first surprise; "but she will not be able to return with you."

"Why not," asked Sir Reginald; "is she not so well?"

"She is very easily fatigued," was the answer, "and she never goes out of doors till the evening, if then."

A few minutes afterwards Alice entered the

room, looking better than usual, for the excitement of the meeting had called up a little colour into her thin cheeks, and she had learnt sufficient self-command to greet Sir Reginald with the civil composure that she would have shown to any other acquaintance. She could not know how easily he saw through that cold, guarded manner, or how eagerly he noted the quiver of the lips and the fast-changing colour, which showed too truly how dear he still was to her.

Never for an instant did those keen dark eyes cease to watch her; even Agnes noticed it, and was surprised, but was far too simple-minded to divine the cause, and only supposed that Sir Reginald admired her beautiful sister; and who ever failed to do that?

After some conversation, it was settled that they should leave Alice to rest now, and return in a little boat later in the afternoon, when they would go for a row along the coast, and return to Briarswood for tea.

This arrangement seemed perfect, combining fresh air and change of scene without fatigue; and Alice consented to it, though not without a secret misgiving as to whether she was



acting wisely. Still she allowed herself to be persuaded by Agnes, who rejoiced to see her sister a little cheered, and inclined to take an interest in the expedition. Anything seemed better than the listless indifference with which she had hitherto met every proposal for her amusement; and the autumn evenings were still too dry and warm for her to take cold.

After luncheon Georgina sat down to the piano, which she greeted as an old friend, and passed her hand lightly over the worn ivory keys.

Alice begged for a song; and, with a grace and feeling peculiarly her own, Georgina sang "The Last Rose of Summer." The sweet tones of her low, full voice were admirably suited to that old but never hackneyed song; and her audience listened with eager attention till the last clear, sustained note died away.

The two visitors then left together, and did not re-appear till four o'clock, when the sun was still bright, and the air fresh and invigorating. Agnes refused to join the expedition herself, but she walked down to the beach with cloaks and warm wraps for Alice, and saw the

party start, with many last injunctions not to go too far or stay too late.

The scene lingered in her memory for years afterwards: Sir Reginald standing up in the boat assisting Alice to take her seat, the sunshine lighting up his noble figure and handsome expressive countenance; Georgina glancing up at him with a proud, loving light in her dark eyes; and Alice's slight form wrapped in a small crimson shawl, her sweet face almost hidden under her shady hat.

It was a glorious evening; the sea lay tranquil as a sleeping child, with not a breath of wind to ruffle its smooth surface. In the distance rose the graceful outline of the *Lady Frances*: the sunbeams had "woven a parting crown" for her tall masts and snowy sails; and Sir Reginald pointed her out to Alice with the conscious pride of ownership.

The time passed like magic, sometimes rowing, and sometimes letting themselves float lazily with the tide, till Alice glanced at her watch, and was startled to find it was nearly seven o'clock. She begged that they might row towards home at once, as she had promised Agnes to be in by seven, and Sir Reginald

set himself to work with a will, and sent the little skiff along the water with the ease and swiftness of a practised oarsman.

As long as our Guardsmen and young men of fashion are in town, they are fond of assuming an air of extreme laziness and *insouciance*, as though it were almost too great an exertion to ask a lady for a dance, or saunter once or twice down the Row on a hot morning in July. But let the season pass, and look at them again on the moors, on the sea, or on their thorough-bred hunters. See how the manly, heroic spirit comes out, and sparkles in their eyes and flushes their cheeks, as they take the true, steady aim which will bring down some stately deer, or urge their horses to the desperate leap, where hesitation or failure is only another name for death.

Some such thoughts as these passed through Alice's mind as she leaned back in the boat and watched the beautiful scenery of the Devonshire coast flit before her eyes like a panorama. Suddenly there was an exclamation. Georgina had dropped her handkerchief into the sea, and was reaching over the side of the boat in order to secure it again.

“Take care,” shouted Sir Reginald. “I can get it. Don’t move, Georgie.”

The caution was unheeded. The handkerchief was tossed by a tiny wave almost within reach. It was too tantalizing; and Georgina made a desperate endeavour to seize it. In a moment there was a sudden lurch of the tiny craft; Alice felt a sensation of extreme cold, a succession of shrill screams sounded in her ears, and seemed to deafen and stun her; then the water rushed triumphantly over the little boat, and all three sank into the cool, green depths below.

## CHAPTER XI.

But Lancelot mused a little space.  
He said, "She has a lovely face ;  
God in His mercy lend her grace,  
The Lady of Shalott."

TENNYSON.

WHEN Alice awoke to consciousness she was lying on a low, hard bed, in a tiny room, scantily and poorly furnished, though everything was scrupulously neat and clean. The low, sloping roof, the mixed smell of dried sea-weed and tar, and, above all, the murmur of the waves close underneath the window, told her that she was in one of the numerous fishermen's cottages which were built along the shore, many of which she knew, and had often visited in old days.

The events of the previous afternoon came slowly back on her memory. It was now early morning, so she must have spent a night

in this strange place. Her watch was lying on a little table by the bed-side. It was apparently uninjured, and was still going. The hands pointed to eight o'clock. Her clothes had evidently been carefully dried and ironed, and were lying on a chair ready for her to put on.

Alice lay still, and listened intently for a few minutes; she then got up and opened the door, to catch any sound there might be in the house. All was still; strangely, ominously so, it seemed to her; but after a few minutes there was a subdued hum of voices, as if people were talking in the room below.

She could bear the suspense and solitude no longer, and began to dress herself. A lengthy and painful operation it was; for though she felt no serious ill effects from the accident, she was much shaken and very weak. At last she was ready, all but her hair, which still hung on her shoulders in damp, heavy curls. She twisted it up carelessly with a comb, and then, opening the door again, glanced down the little passage.

No sound was to be heard, so she left her room, and opened the first door she came to

on the right-hand side. It was a little room, exactly resembling the one she had just left, only whereas the October sunshine was streaming into hers, making it bright and cheerful, here the blinds were drawn down, and everything wore an air of perfect stillness and repose. On the bed lay Georgina, dressed, to Alice's surprise, in the same clothes she had worn the day before. The water had dripped from them, and made a small pool on the floor.

Unable to account for anything so strange and neglectful, Alice walked to the bedside, and spoke to her cousin. There was no answer, and more and more astonished, Alice took the icy hand in hers, and bent over her. The pretty little face looked strangely white and still; the dark blue eyes were scarcely closed; and the soft wavy hair was all down, and floating in damp brown masses over the pillow.

What was there in those familiar features which sent a chill to Alice's heart, and made her recoil with a shudder of fear? She had never looked on death before, and her first feeling was one of very natural alarm; her next, one of utter incredulity. Kneeling by

the bedside, she parted the curls from the marble brow, and started to see a purple bruise there. At that moment the door opened, and, turning round, Alice saw Mr. Dalgetty. He gazed at her in astonishment, and then, coming forward, spoke in a subdued tone, but hurriedly, and with nervousness.

“You ought not to be here, Miss Godolphin. I thought the woman of the house was with you. You should not have been left alone.”

“I am quite well,” she replied, in a voice that was unnaturally calm and steady. “But, oh, Mr. Dalgetty, what is this? Dear, dear little Georgie—” The calm voice failed, and she burst into passionate weeping.

Mr. Dalgetty took her hand, and quietly drew her from the room. Out of sight of that sweet, still face, her composure returned, and she inquired for Sir Reginald.

“He is quite well; you will see him in the parlour below. But you must eat something first.”

And he took her into the clean, tidy kitchen, which was built out behind the little front room. Here they found the mistress of the



house, a bustling, good-natured, little woman, who was busily engaged in preparing a warm drink for the "poor dear young lady" upstairs, and was much surprised to see the young lady herself, looking pale and worn indeed, but dressed in her every-day clothes, and able to speak and move about as usual.

Mr. Dalgetty watched his charge while she took some refreshment, and answered the few questions she put to him. He could tell her nothing about the accident, except that Sir Reginald had carried her up from the beach, and that Georgina had been brought up afterwards by a fisherman.

"The doctor was here almost directly," he continued, "but nothing could be done for Miss Lascelles; life was extinct before she was taken from the water. You revived very soon, and even spoke. Mr. Long said we need have no fears for you."

"I have no recollection of it."

"Very likely not; you were so much exhausted."

"How did you know of the accident?"

"I happened to be visiting these cottages at the time, and saw a crowd on the beach.

Some one told me you were in the boat that had foundered."

And his face paled even now at the thought of what that moment had been to him.

"Is Agnes here?"

"She came last night, but was obliged to leave again, when Mr. Long told her it was not necessary for her to stay. Your father was so much shaken by the news that she was afraid to alarm him further by remaining here. Mrs. Bartram stayed some hours; and they will both be here this morning to take you home, and see that all is done properly for that poor child."

"And Lady Frances?"

"She may come this morning; I don't know. They say she has gone from one fainting fit into another ever since she heard of the accident. Mrs. Bartram was to spend the night with her."

"Poor Aunt Frances! she was so fond of Georgie. I think she was her favourite child. May I see Sir Reginald now?"

He opened the door for her which led into the little parlour, but did not enter himself. Sir Reginald was standing by the window.

His face was much flushed, and his voice sounded hoarse and strange as he made eager inquiries after Alice's health.

She answered briefly; then, looking up imploringly, almost reproachfully, in his face, she said,—“ Oh, Sir Reginald, you saved my life, could you not have saved Georgina's too ? ”

“ How could I ? ” he said, hurriedly. “ You mistake; she was not drowned. Her head struck against the boat as she rose to the surface of the water. The blow killed her at once.”

“ Was I nearer to you ? ”

“ No—but—I could not allow any one else the joy of saving *your* life, and I knew there was no hope for Georgina when I saw her body floating on the water.”

“ But, Sir Reginald, had she been rescued at once—she may have been only stunned.”

“ I tell you she *was* dead.”

He spoke imperatively, almost sharply, as one who wishes to end a distasteful subject.

It was a strange account. Alice pondered over it for some minutes, and it seemed more and more mysterious. Was this the tone, the manner of a man who had just lost, and that

by a sudden and awful accident, the person who was dearest to him in the whole world, or should have been so? Those dry eyes, flushed cheeks, and nervous, unnatural manner, did they betoken a deep, suppressed sorrow, or were they the signs of some awful, unexplained mystery? She could not tell; but she shuddered when Sir Reginald bent over her, and said reproachfully,—“Not a word of thanks from you, Alice? I saved your life at the risk of my own.”

She looked up suddenly. “I cannot understand it, and I cannot thank you till I do. If I was nearer the fisherman’s boat than to you, surely he could easily have rescued me; and Georgina might have been saved perhaps by you.”

Sir Reginald did not answer till he had sat down close to Alice, and taken her cold reluctant hand in his.

“Alice, do you not know what it is to act on the impulse of a moment? Listen. You had drifted with the tide some way from the boat, and I saw you struggling and crying for help. Georgina was close to me, but she was floating quietly on the water, still and dead.

I swear it. She would never have lain so still if she had not been dead. You believe me?"

Alice bowed her head.

"In a few seconds the fisherman (who, by the way, is the owner of this hut) would have rescued you. I could not bear that, and I was in time, after all. I brought you to land; it was I who saved your life. Alice, my darling, you will yet be mine."

In unspeakable astonishment and horror she raised her eyes to his. Those words would have filled her with joy a few weeks since, but *now*.

"Hush, Sir Reginald," she answered, coldly; "by speaking in this way you insult *me*, and you insult *her*."

"I know; I ought to have kept silence; but you will forgive me, Alice; I have loved you so dearly."

"How can you say so?" she murmured. "You never cared for me."

"I did not know it. Not till after my own engagement; not till I heard you were about to give yourself to another man; *then* the misery I felt showed me how useless it was to

try and forget you. You turn away from me, Alice; have I sinned beyond forgiveness?"

She was spared a reply, for at that moment a pony carriage stopped at the cottage door, and Mrs. Bartram and Agnes entered the room. It was characteristic of the elder sister that, after her first joyful greeting, she did not forget to turn to Sir Reginald and thank him with heartfelt earnestness for "the noble way in which he had saved Alice's life"; and then, without further talking or inquiries, went quietly upstairs to fetch her sister's hat and cloak, that they might start homewards without delay.

It was very necessary that Alice should have rest. The excitement of her interview with Sir Reginald had tried her even more than the accident, and she leaned against the table for support, with cheeks of ashy whiteness.

Mrs. Bartram had left the room with Agnes; and Sir Reginald came up close to Alice, and whispered hastily, "Give me one kind word, Alice; we may not meet again for a long while."

She motioned him away with a gesture

expressive of so much displeasure and aversion that his cheek flushed with anger.

"I believe you look on me as a murderer," he said, bitterly.

She did not answer; perhaps she could not. Agnes's step was heard, and, in desperation, Sir Reginald seized her hand.

"I will not ask you to give me a decisive answer; I know it is too soon. I am going abroad at once; will you give me leave to return?"

She shook off his hand, and looked him steadily in the face. "I will never willingly see you again, Sir Reginald," was her reply. "I loved you dearly once, most dearly; but I now see you as you are,—cold, fickle, selfish, and, for all I know, *worse than that*. And did I know nothing against you, the memory of my cousin must be a barrier between us for ever."

His face whitened, even to the lips.

"Is this your answer?"

"It is, my final answer."

In another moment Agnes had helped her sister into the pony-chaise, and they were driving rapidly from the house. With a *sang-*

*froid* of which only an Englishman could be capable, Sir Reginald came to the door, and took his hat off with the ceremonious grace for which he was noted. Alice did not see him; her face was hidden beneath her drooping hat, and she was sobbing bitterly. She could not have acted otherwise, and yet—*how* she loved him.

Agnes was much alarmed, and drove on with all speed, for this agitation, though natural enough, was the worst thing possible for her sister, and she felt intensely anxious to get her home. She persuaded her to go to bed at once, and Alice complied readily, and slept for hours the heavy sleep of exhaustion.

They saw Georgina once more. The inquest was held at the "Star and Crown," a small inn in the town of Southport, and a verdict of "Accidental Death" was returned without any discussion. The fisherman who had rescued Georgina's body was unusually illiterate and stupid, even for his class of life, and his clumsy evidence threw no shade on Sir Reginald's behaviour; indeed, the jurors complimented the young Baronet on his "heroic conduct and presence of mind."



The funeral was to take place on Thursday, and on Wednesday Agnes and Alice went with Miss Fairfax to take a last farewell of their little cousin. It was a beautiful sight, even then. The "rapture of repose" was more marked, more impressive, than when Alice had first seen her. The eyes were quite closed now, and the dark sweeping lashes rested peacefully on the marble cheek. Many would mourn for that young life, apparently so prematurely cut off in the prime of youth, health, and enjoyment; but was it, indeed, a subject for sorrow?

Had she lived, she must have known of the faithlessness and dishonour of the man she loved so dearly; whereas *now* she had gone to her grave in the peaceful assurance that he loved her even as she loved him. No doubtful thought had ever troubled the serenity of her perfect trust and confidence.

Happy Georgie! Happy to die with a faith and happiness still unclouded, while the waters of life were still fresh and sweet to her taste, and the cup of disappointment had not even suggested itself to her imagination.

Mr. Dalgetty did not know how truly he

spoke, when he checked Lady Frances's passionate grief at the side of the open coffin, and said, while pointing to the calm, beautiful features,—“ You should not mourn for one so young and innocent. She *must* have known grief if she had lived, but it has pleased God to take her away from the possibility of sorrow for evermore.”

## CHAPTER XII.

You may break, you may shatter, the vase as you will,  
But the scent of the roses will cling round it still.

MOORE.

SIR REGINALD disappeared immediately after the funeral, and the Godolphins saw no more of him. Report said that he was travelling in America, but nothing was known definitely of his movements, and, by degrees, Miss Fairfax and Agnes ceased to talk of and pity him.

But had Alice forgotten him? Not for a day, not for an hour. Though her confidence had been so rudely shaken, the old glamour, the "scent of the roses," still clung round that cherished ideal; and in his absence she forgot his many faults, and even the grave suspicion that was attached to his conduct. He was again her hero; her darling, noble Reginald. Those dark, beseeching eyes did "haunt her

day and night," as "angered Eleanor's" did fair Rosamond, till she began to reproach herself for unkindness and precipitancy. She *must* have refused him at that time, but it might have been done more kindly, and, perhaps, not so effectually as to preclude him from *any* hope in the future. She had been severe, perhaps unjust.

Thus did this foolish girl distress and reproach herself, while the object of her remorseful pity was enjoying himself in New York, seeking a panacea for his sorrows (which, after all, consisted more of wounded pride than wounded affection) in the many festivities of that gay and fascinating city.

Doubtless he had his sorrowful moments. It was his nature to care most for the unattainable; and he sometimes considered himself a very hardly used man for having lost both his lady-loves at "one fell swoop." However, after a time he ceased to mourn over his rejection, and even persuaded himself that he had had a great escape, and that it was a fortunate thing that he was not tied to a consumptive girl without a farthing of money,

and who loved him too well not to be jealous and exacting.

The bright-eyed American beauties completed his cure ; and he speedily made himself popular amongst them, flirting, perhaps, rather more recklessly and unguardedly than of old, but otherwise unaltered. And, meanwhile, that faithful heart mourned for him at home, till the bright spirits fled for ever, and the brilliant beauty he had so much admired was rapidly becoming a thing of the past.

It was a sad winter for Alice, but a new joy had spread its golden wings for Agnes, and each happy hour was bringing it nearer. The daily walks and drives with the Bartrams had been remarked for some time by the neighbourhood, and many kind friends rejoiced to see the change that was taking place for the better in Agnes Godolphin, whose soft eyes grew brighter, and her smile more joyous, as each day passed by. It had gradually come to be an understood thing in all their little excursions that Mrs. Bartram should walk by Alice's wheel-chair, and that Agnes and the Major should roam long distances by them-

selves to the left or right, as the fancy seized them.

At first Mrs. Bartram scarcely approved of this line of conduct on the part of her son; but by degrees she came to understand it, and during these walks a quiet, satisfied smile would often play on her features, which spoke volumes to Miss Fairfax, if not to Alice. She decidedly encouraged the Major's very evident preference for Agnes's society; but she was too wise a mother, and too experienced a tactician, to risk the whole matter by speaking to her son.

She was not misled. Major Bartram was very much attracted to Agnes. She was so different to the young ladies he had been accustomed to see; none of whom, during several London seasons, had succeeded in awakening a warm interest in his heart. He had had enough of fashionable beauties; it was a positive relief and pleasure to him to look at this country girl in her straw hat and grey alpaca.

Agnes's dress was almost conventual in its extreme quietness and simplicity; but this was pleasing in his eyes, from the force of contrast,

as well as from an artistic appreciation of what was really suitable and becoming,—and her manner, so gentle, retiring, and unconscious, yet possessing a certain graceful dignity of her own, which would have lent charms to a far plainer face and figure.

Major Bartram, who was not without a certain dry humour of his own, had hitherto persisted in dividing young ladies into three classes, *i. e.*, flirty, jerky, and perky, — the first, over - bold and demonstrative; the second, awkward, *gauche*, and nervous; the third, conceited, sarcastic, and altogether odious.

Agnes was the reverse of all these—gentle, humble, and affectionate. Her domestic qualities were at last appreciated as they deserved, and the prize for which so many ambitious mothers had been sighing during twenty-four successive seasons was laid submissively at her feet.

When the astounding fact dawned upon her that she had actually inspired a genuine, romantic attachment, such as she had often read and dreamt of, but had never imagined would ever fall to her happy lot, the first

rapturous feeling was quickly succeeded by others not quite so agreeable. How could she marry? Alice, though not so ill as she had been in the autumn, was still in a most precarious state of health, low and nervous to the last degree; and Mr. Godolphin had grown to depend entirely on his elder daughter.

How was it possible to leave them both to the tender mercies of Mr. Dalgetty and Miss Fairfax? No, it was not possible; and Agnes stood her ground, and gently but decidedly refused to enter into any positive engagement beyond an avowal of preference, which either party might adhere to or break without loss of honour.

But if she was resolute, Major Bartram was more so; and, in despair, he ended by appealing directly to Mr. Godolphin, and urging him to exert his parental authority and settle the matter. If Agnes had tried to induce her father to consent to the engagement, he would certainly have refused, and called her an undutiful, selfish girl for wishing to forsake him in his old age; but as she professed to desire nothing so much as to remain single, he took the oppo-



site line of argument, and insisted that she should be married at once.

A compromise was effected. They were to be actually engaged; but the marriage was not to take place till the following summer (it was now January); so there would be quite five months to spare. The Major grumbled, but finally gave way, for the excellent reason that he could not help it.

And so the winter days passed away in happy, peaceful tranquillity till the end of January was reached, and the mild Devonshire spring set in with unusual warmth. Alice was often able to sit for hours in a sheltered place in the rocks, with Mrs. Bartram or Miss Fairfax beside her; while Agnes and her true knight would wander far on the cliffs, or down below on the sunny sands.

It had occurred of late to Miss Fairfax, that Alice was more depressed in spirits than was quite warranted by her state of health; and she joined her one day on the rocks, meaning to say a few rousing words on the duty of cheerfulness, and of not succumbing so entirely to feelings of weakness or despondency. She opened the conversation by observing that the

weather was unusually mild; and before long Alice must throw off invalid habits, and drive and walk about as of old.

“I don’t know,” was the weary answer. “My cough is nearly gone, but I do not feel much stronger; everything is such an exertion to me.”

“The worst of such an illness as yours, my dear, is that it leaves a constitutional weakness which encourages you to feel depressed and idle long after the real danger is passed. Occupation—sensible occupation, not dawdling over a novel or a book of poetry—is the best remedy for the feeling you complain of.” And Miss Fairfax’s knitting needles flew with an energy and rapidity which almost dazzled Alice’s eyes as she looked at them. “You cannot enjoy rest if you never work,” continued the good lady; “work is the real savour and salt of life. Everything loses colour and interest if you try to lead the life of the ‘Lotos-eaters’ in what’s-his-name’s stupid poem. Alice, are you attending to me?” For the young girl’s eyes were fixed with a dreamy intentness on the distant outline of a little vessel which recalled the “Lady Frances” to her memory.

But at Miss Fairfax's question she looked up with her own sweet smile, and answered,—“ It is very kind of you to interest yourself about me, dear Miss Fairfax, and I will try and take your advice. I know I ought to do more, but it is very difficult.”

“ What is difficult ? ”

“ To work on in the shade when the sunshine is gone for ever. And I am not yet twenty.”

“ This is foolish, Alice; quite irrational.” And Miss Fairfax spoke with the more severity that she felt her eyes filling with tears. “ You have more sunshine in your life than most girls, a happy home, many friends, and a sister who has been a mother to you since you lost your own.”

“ What is all that to a ruined life, and a broken heart ? ”

The words were scarcely audible, for Alice had hid her face in her hands; but Miss Fairfax heard them, and a look of comprehension came over her sensible face. She took a sudden resolution, and carried it out with the impetuosity which belonged to her nature.

Laying aside her work, she took Alice's hand in hers, and said, in a low, earnest voice,—“My child, if the sunshine has passed away from your life, it is still possible that you may make the happiness of another, and, in so doing, peace and joy will return to your own soul.” Alice looked up with wondering eyes. “A noble, loving heart has long been devoted to you,” continued the good lady, warming into enthusiasm as she enlarged upon her favourite subject. “A devoted, unselfish, hard-working clergyman will make you a better husband than an empty-headed fop like that Sir Reginald, who is gone. You may be proud of the love of such a man as Mr. Dalgetty.”

Alice drew away her hand in consternation, and exclaimed, in a dismayed tone,—“Mr. Dalgetty! he never can have thought—Miss Fairfax, how *can* you tell?”

“Because he confided in me before you went to London, and had your head turned by that foolish aunt of yours. Perhaps I ought not to have betrayed his confidence, but it came out somehow. Think over it calmly, Alice, and don't decide either way in a hurry.

See, Agnes is making signs to us. I will go, and see what she wants." And off sprang the active little lady, with the more alacrity that she thought she perceived a tall form in the distance, which might chance to be the young rector himself.

She was not mistaken. It was Mr. Dalgetty; and in another five minutes he had perceived Alice in her sheltered nook, and walked straight up to her. Poor Alice blushed "ruddier than the cherry," and found some difficulty in answering his kind inquiries with her usual gentle composure.

Perhaps Mr. Dalgetty interpreted this confusion in a manner favourable to himself; at any rate he did what he had not done for months, —he took a seat beside her and entered into conversation. Ere long the favourable circumstances, the solitude, and her agitated manner (increased no doubt by extreme nervousness and weakness), emboldened him to lay aside his cautious reserve, and, to poor Alice's horror, she found his conversation becoming each moment more lover-like. With true womanly tact, she contrived to turn the conversation, without wounding his feelings, by the sudden

remark,—“You have dropped your paper, Mr. Dalgetty; it will be blown away in a moment.”

A shade came over his countenance, and when he returned to her side with the errant newspaper in his hand, his manner had changed, and he said gravely,—“I had forgotten what I had to tell you, or rather, I should say” (he became a little confused), “I meant to have spoken to Miss Godolphin. I think you do not get your papers till Saturday?”

“No, we do not. Is there any special news?”

“There are rumours—very likely to be untrue, or exaggerated, but it may save you a shock—”

“Oh, Mr. Dalgetty, what is it?”

He still hesitated, and Alice took the *Times* from his reluctant hand, and read, under the list of “Casualties” :—

“Serious apprehensions are entertained as to the safety of the yacht ‘Lady Frances,’ the property of Sir Reginald Godolphin, Bart., which is reported to have been wrecked off Alexandria.”

There was another paragraph below :—

“A telegram has been received from Alexandria, confirming the above report. It is feared that all on board the yacht perished.”

The words swam before Alice's eyes; she made a strong effort to retain her self-command, but in vain. The paper dropped from her hand, and her eyes closed in one of those death-like faints to which she had once before succumbed.

Much terrified at the result of his imprudence, Mr. Dalgetty made eager signals to the party below, and ere long, with the assistance of Major Bartram, Alice was carried to the house and laid in her own little room. Slowly and painfully consciousness returned; but it was fully an hour before Miss Fairfax descended to speak to Mr. Dalgetty, who was pacing anxiously up and down inside the garden, and her first words relieved his most pressing anxiety.

“I never can forgive myself,” was his impetuous reply to her soothing words; “after all these months of self-restraint, to fail at last! Had it not been for the agitation caused by

my selfish imprudence, she might have borne this shock with firmness."

"Ah," said Miss Fairfax, interrogatively, "you have spoken to her?"

"No, no, nothing definite; but I said more than was prudent in her weak state."

"Do not distress yourself," was the kind reply. "The real shock was hearing of Sir Reginald's death, and that must have come sooner or later. To be sure, they were only distant cousins" (oh, Miss Fairfax, where is your truthful candour now?), "but it is an awful thing, and she had known him well in London. Ah, there is the doctor; what an age he has been." And she hastened to meet him, leaving the clergyman partially consoled by the promise that he should hear the medical report without delay.

Good Mr. Long's visit was not as re-assuring as usual. He remained so long, and asked so many anxious, searching questions, that when he left the room Agnes followed him, and said,—"You told us my sister was nearly well, Mr. Long, last time you saw her. Has she really lost much ground?"

"I told you to keep her quiet and not let her



take cold, and you have done neither the one nor the other," was the rough but not unkindly answer. "I don't blame you, my dear young lady; but experienced women like Mrs. Bartram and Miss Fairfax ought to have known better than to let a consumptive patient sit out of doors in February, be the weather ever so mild. I will look in to-morrow." And he was gone.

Poor Agnes felt her heart sink within her with apprehensive misery. "A consumptive patient!" He had never admitted as much before. Why had they not been told this before it was too late? for that it *was* too late, she could not, in that moment of despondency, bring herself to doubt. But not for long did that brave, unselfish spirit fail; a few minutes of prayerful solitude, and Agnes returned to her post in Alice's room, the sweet face, perhaps, a shade paler than usual, but bright and loving as ever. She had need of all her courage.

From that day Alice seemed to resign the feeble struggle she had hitherto made against the inroads of disease; for though the resources of youth are all but inexhaustible, and she soon revived sufficiently to be carried into another

room, she never really rallied. The tired blue eyes seldom closed day or night, and had always a pitiful, imploring glance, like some hunted deer, that it was hard for her sister to witness. She agreed passively to every remedy they suggested, but always with the same gentle, weary, hopeless smile, as though she knew the uselessness of it all, and only submitted that they might have nothing to reproach themselves with hereafter.

Agnes had one great comfort. There were no concealments now. Alice told her the whole history of her ill-fated love,—omitting nothing, concealing nothing,—only exonerating Sir Reginald as much as possible from blame. “He had been so much flattered and sought after,” she would say, in her soft, pleading voice, “it was very natural that he should be a little spoilt and inconsiderate; and you see, Agnes dear, he never would have been happy with a foolish little country girl like me.”

Agnes could only turn away with a bitter sigh, and pray that she might be taught to forgive.

The most sanguine of Alice’s friends, in-

cluding Miss Fairfax, who persisted in hoping to the last, now ceased to consider her recovery as a thing possible. Besides the grief which was preying on her heart, a severe cold, caught during those imprudent outdoor excursions, had fastened on her chest; and the disease, which had only been arrested for a time, never subdued, revived in all its strength, and threatened to make short work of that delicate frame.

About this time a letter arrived from Lady Frances, who had been spending the winter with her married daughter at Pau. Strange to say, she made no mention of Sir Reginald's mournful death. The letter was written in a discontented tone—complaining bitterly of the unseasonable weather, and of the anxiety she had been suffering on Constance's account, whose health appeared to be very uncertain.

Agnes read this letter to Major Bartram as they sat together in the little morning-room, only separated from Alice's by a folding-door, which was generally left ajar. "Not a word of Georgina or of Sir Reginald," remarked Agnes, as she folded up the letter and replaced it in the thin foreign envelope for Alice to

read; "but she writes as if she was very unhappy. Poor Aunt Frances, I hope she will not lose Constance too!"

The Major did not answer at once; but at last he said, thoughtfully,—“I have never been able to understand poor Georgina’s death.”

Agnes looked at him in surprise. “It was very simply accounted for,” she answered. “Her head must have struck against the boat as she rose to the surface of the water. The blow killed her before she could have been drowned, so they all supposed.”

“Sir Reginald declared at the inquest that he saw her body floating dead on the water,” replied the Major, in an unconvinced tone of voice. “*That* is an impossibility with all her heavy wet things on; she might have risen to the surface once or even twice, but she could not have floated. It is an improbable story, Agnes: I sometimes think” (and his voice sank almost to a whisper) “that he did not do *his best* to save her.”

“You think she was not dead—that she might have been saved?” exclaimed Agnes, with white cheeks.

“Hush, dear; I don’t know; never speak of this. I may be altogether mistaken; only if it *were* so, it would be a strange decree of Justice that he should be drowned himself scarcely three months after. Poor Godolphin! he was once one of my best friends.”

“So I have heard,” said Agnes, with interest. And then, seeing his expression, she forbore to say more; and taking his hand lovingly in hers, she said,—“It is an awful suspicion, dear Arthur. You must never dwell on it now. We must not run the risk of thinking uncharitably of the dead.”

She was interrupted by a call from the next room, and, hastening in, Agnes found her sister sitting up with flushed cheeks, and wild, excited eyes. “Agnes, I knew it,” she exclaimed, throwing her arms round her sister; “Arthur is right. My Reginald is a murderer in the sight of God.”

Much alarmed, Agnes said, in a soothing tone,—“Hush, darling, it is not fair to Sir Reginald even to think of this; he can never defend himself now.”

The excitable paroxysm passed away, and Alice closed her eyes wearily. “I shall know

soon," she murmured. "Go back to Arthur, dear Agnes, he will want you."

Seeing that she really wished it, Agnes left her, but returned in a few minutes with Mr. Dalgetty, whom she found waiting in the drawing-room. Whatever painful or conscious feelings the young man might have had in fulfilling the offices of a clergyman to a dying parishioner, when that parishioner was Alice Godolphin, they were never suffered to interfere with his duty. Almost daily he visited the house, and read and prayed with her, till she ceased to feel nervous and uncomfortable in his presence, and her old reverential feeling towards him returned.

So February passed away; but at the beginning of March a change came. Few who had known Alice in her bright, happy days, would have recognized her now. The fair face had completely lost its round, girlish contour; beautiful it was still, and would be to the end, but it was a mournful, touching beauty, not the bright enchanting sight it had once been. She did not grieve for herself; on the contrary, she was very happy—happier as each day passed and left one less to be gone through.

"I have had a great deal of happiness in my life," she said one day to Miss Fairfax; "and now, when all that is over, I am not going to live on in gloom, as so many have had to do. Do you remember the last song we heard dear Georgie sing?—

"'I'll not leave thee, thou lone one, to pine on the stem,  
Since the lovely are sleeping, go sleep thou with them.'

I shall be very happy, dear Miss Fairfax, when I am allowed to 'sleep with them.'"

"You do not think of us, my child," said the kind old friend beside her. "How shall we do without you?"

"You can spare me better than Agnes," answered Alice, in a firmer tone. "I have always been a weak, unstable character. I was weak in going to London with Aunt Frances, weak in remaining there when I knew it was doing me harm, falsely and wickedly weak in denying that I cared for Sir Reginald, and weakest of all in continuing to love him now."

"My darling, he was a wicked, unscrupulous man. You surely acknowledge that now? You have surely ceased to love him?"

Alice turned away her head, and returned no answer. Miss Fairfax sighed heavily. Would she *never* cease to mourn over him?—must her last hours be clouded with that sad, hopeless memory? Yes. For not till the sea gives up her dead, and she sees him again, and knows him as he *is*, will Alice cease to love blindly, devotedly, though she believes that beautiful face is lying five fathoms deep in the blue waters of the Mediterranean.

The long struggle was soon over now. One day, when Mr. Dalgetty was reading, he felt anxious at the profound stillness in the room, and, going up close to the sofa, he saw that the golden head had fallen back on the pillow, and a pallor as of death had crept over her face. It was the shadow of Death, but not Death itself. She lived for some hours afterwards; and when the end came, it came so peacefully and calmly, that the watchers in the room knew not of it, and only Mr. Dalgetty's loving, eager gaze, saw the moment when the wearied spirit was freed at last.

Even in the first overwhelming grief, Agnes's first thought was one of thankfulness. Was it not well and kindly done of the great



Husbandman to transplant that fading flower from the ungenial climate of this world, and bid it bloom in the fields of Paradise bright and immortal for ever ?

Agnes's heart's desire for her sister had been "rest and peace," and was it not abundantly granted?—a rest that would never again be broken, a peace that the world could never take away or disturb; for such natures as Alice Godolphin are scarcely fit for this world. Such a capacity for faithful, self-sacrificing love is a dangerous gift, and seldom productive of happiness in this life, unless combined with a calm judgment and a firmness of character such as was not given to her.

So Alice Godolphin was buried by her cousin in the churchyard close by the sea, in the "sure and certain hope" of awakening to a life in which she could never again be heart-broken and deceived.

## CHAPTER XIII.

And Love that never found his earthly close,  
What sequel? streaming eyes and breaking hearts,  
Or all the same as if he had not been? Not so.

TENNYSON.

THREE days after Alice's funeral, Agnes was sitting alone in the churchyard, where she had gone to lay some early March violets on the newly-made grave. Still as everything was around her save the low murmur of the sea, she was so absorbed in her own sad thoughts, that she did not perceive for some time that a gentleman was moving about amongst the graves close to her, as if searching for something.

When, at last, she raised her eyes, she gave a horrified start, and dropped all her flowers in the excitement of the moment. Once seen, that noble figure could not be mistaken; and after that first startled glance, Agnes hardly felt

surprised when he turned round, and she saw the well-remembered features of Sir Reginald Godolphin.

He recognized her at the same moment, and came forward with eager, outstretched hand. At any other time, she might have been alarmed at this sudden apparition of one whom she believed to be dead; but the first numbing sensation caused by a great sorrow has the effect of deadening all shocks, and when she drew back at his approach, it was in displeasure not in terror. She could not shake hands with him over *that* grave.

“I see you are not pleased to see me, Miss Godolphin,” he said, after a moment’s hesitation. “I will not trouble you for many minutes. Will you show me your sister’s grave?”

Agnes silently pointed to the long, low mound beside her, on which the grass had hardly begun to appear; and he came forward, and read the inscription on the marble cross above:—

ALICE GODOLPHIN,

DIED MARCH 5TH, 1861. AGED 19.

“He bringeth them to the haven where they would be.”

It was the text she had chosen for herself.

“Only nineteen,” murmured Sir Reginald; “I thought she had been older.”

“It must have been a short life,” spoke Agnes, in a tone which all the gentle charity of her nature could not keep from sounding bitterly reproachful; “but it might have been a happy one but for you.”

“Do not reproach me here,” he said, almost imploringly. “I was selfish and thoughtless, I know; but not so wicked as you may suppose. Let me say a few words to you in my own defence; I shall not have another opportunity.”

But she had turned away, and was leaving the churchyard. He followed her, and took the little black-gloved hand in his. Agnes turned round indignantly, and, in the anger of the moment, spoke words which, a few minutes afterwards, she would have given worlds to recall.

“If you have anything to say to me, Sir Reginald, I will hear it, but not *here*. How can you dare to visit the graves of those you murdered so cruelly? for in the sight of God

you did murder them. He will revenge them, though man cannot."

He did not return the answer which might have been expected from one of his haughty, impetuous nature, but walked slowly on by her side, and spoke not a word till the little gate closed behind them. In those few seconds Agnes had time to notice that he was much altered. His appearance used to be particularly youthful, but he looked his age now, every year of it. There were wrinkles in the broad white brow, which had been smooth as ivory three months since, and there was an anxious, almost a deprecating, look in the dark eyes, which suited little with the haughty character of his face.

Noting these changes, Agnes almost reproached herself for her previous harshness; and it was in a less severe tone that she remarked at last,—“It was reported in the papers that you and your crew were all drowned. How did you escape?”

“The papers were correct,” he replied. “My yacht was lost, and all on board perished. I did not sail in her: she was lent to a friend for a three days’ cruise. I thought myself

remarkably fortunate at the time. I scarcely think so now."

He spoke in so mournful and bitter a tone that Agnes was softened towards him in spite of herself.

"It would have been a comfort to my sister to have known this," she said.

"I trust that seeing that report gave her no shock,—in no way hastened her death?"

"The real mischief was done before; but no doubt it hastened the end."

"You are disposed to judge me very harshly, Miss Godolphin. It is natural, I suppose; but you should be just. Doubtless your sister told you much that had passed between us. Did she ever tell you that, before leaving England, I asked her to become my wife?"

"You knew she could not accept you under those circumstances."

"I acted on impulse, and foolishly, no doubt; but I did not expect to be refused in terms the most unjust, and even insulting, such as *you* addressed to me just now. What have I ever done to be called a murderer?"

Agnes did not answer.

"You might pity me a little, Miss Go-

dolphin. You do not know what I have gone through on your sister's account. I never knew how much I cared for her till I heard these tidings at Southampton, and knew that I should never see her again. If I had known her to be so near death, I should never have left England."

Agnes could scarcely believe her ears. Could this be the cold, proud, selfish Sir Reginald Godolphin actually appealing to her for *pity*? The tears were in her eyes as she answered,—"God forgive me if I have judged you harshly, Sir Reginald. It is of no use to discuss this now, or at any time. Good-bye." For they had reached the little gate leading into the garden, and she did not ask him to enter.

"One more word. I heard other tidings in the town about you and my old friend Bartram. Is it true? May I congratulate? You will forgive my asking the question."

"It is true," answered Agnes, with downcast eyes, in which the tears were still standing; "but nothing can take place for a long while yet. You will find Major Bartram on the beach below, if you would like to .

“speak to him.” And she escaped into the house.

From the window of her room she watched Sir Reginald descend by the steep little cliff path on to the sands, and saw the meeting between the two old friends. They walked up and down for nearly an hour, and then parted, evidently on friendly terms, though not with the cordial hand-shake of old times.

Agnes never knew what passed at that interview, and she had the tact and good feeling not to interrogate Major Bartram. Only when they were taking their customary evening walk he said,—“We must not think or speak unkindly of poor Godolphin, dear Agnes. Whatever his faults may have been, he will never be a really happy man again.”

“You are quite right, Arthur,” was her reply. “I was glad to see that you did not part in enmity.”

“I could not but shake hands with him,” said the Major, sadly. “It is for the last time; and we were old friends.”

After this the subject was never again mentioned between them.

That same evening Agnes took out a few of



her sister's golden curls, which had been cut off during her illness, and gave one to each of the dear friends who had been such a comfort to her. Miss Fairfax asked for two, and gave one to Mr. Dalgetty, in her warm sympathy for the broken-hearted man. He received it as a most sacred and precious treasure, and showed a warm gratitude almost disproportionate to the small kindness.

There is little more to tell concerning the actors in this short tale.

Towards the close of the year Agnes and Major Bartram were married, and during Mr. Godolphin's life, which was prolonged for nearly two years, they never left him for more than a few weeks. At the end of that time they went to live in London, and Agnes never ceased to exercise, in her altered position and increased responsibilities, the wise and lovable qualities which had first endeared her to her husband. Prosperity could not injure that gentle nature, and they were happy as two people can scarcely fail to be whose pursuits are congenial and their love unchangeable.

Sir Reginald Godolphin never married. His

was a forlorn and loveless life, spent chiefly abroad; and when he died at Florence, at a comparatively early age, there were none to mourn, and but few to pity him.

Lady Braughton's delicate husband did not live long, and she came to live in London alone—a childless widow, always in feeble health.

Lady Frances Godolphin lived to a great age, and continued to cling fast to the world and its gaities to the last moment of her life. Long after her handsome matronly looks had departed, she was to be seen at balls and parties, regarded by her entertainers as a sort of necessary evil, dressing younger every year, till people forgot the beautiful hospitable leader of fashion she had once been, in the tiresome, vain old woman, who never seemed to know when she was in the way, and made herself ridiculous by insisting on attentions no longer willingly paid.

And Mr. Dalgetty? Soon after the Bartrams left Southport he obtained a church in London, and became one of the most useful and energetic of our East-End clergymen. Sorrow had refined and chastened that noble nature till its

natural pride and censoriousness vanished for ever, and his gentleness and charity passed into a proverb. He never married ; but when, many years afterwards, he was taken to his rest, they found next his heart a small packet containing a lock of golden hair, on which was written the name—ALICE GODOLPHIN.

END OF ALICE GODOLPHIN.



# A LITTLE HEIRESS.



# A LITTLE HEIRESS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### LEFT ALONE.

The heart of childhood is all mirth,  
We frolic to and fro,  
As free and blithe, as if on earth  
Were no such thing as woe.

KEBLE.

SINCE I grew up, the question has been frequently put to me,—“How far back does your memory carry you? What is the earliest thing you can remember?” So often have I been asked these questions, and others like them (probably owing to my life having been one of unusual variety and interest), that I have finally determined to write my own

life, following the advice given to us in our nursery days, and "beginning at the beginning."

Besides a few babyish recollections, not worth recording, the first picture which stands out clearly in my memory is a large bare nursery, situated at the very top of a great old rambling house in the country; numerous half-packed boxes and bags scattered about the room—a general air of discomfort and untidiness pervading the whole place—and myself, a tiny child of six years old, standing before a glass while undergoing the miserable process of being dressed in a hot, tight black frock, almost entirely smothered in crape. Well do I remember the childish face which looked back at me from the cracked old nursery looking-glass; large dark eyes all swelled and red with tears, mournful pouting lips also disfigured by sorrow, and a mass of tangled curly hair drawn back from my forehead, and tied behind with a broad black ribbon.

I can almost hear the voice of my dear old nurse saying, in the peculiar wheedling tone supposed to be consoling to sorrowing child-



hood,—“Now, my deary, don’t cry any more. You’ll make your pretty eyes not fit to be seen, and tugging at your dress like that won’t make it any cooler, and will pull it all out of shape. And I do want you to look nice, darling, before all the gentlemen downstairs. They won’t believe you to be the pretty little girl they saw last year.”

This last judicious caution had its effect. I was not without a certain childish vanity of my own, and hot, miserable, and feverish with crying as I was, I took my nurse’s hand obediently, and walked by her side down the broad staircase, and through many long passages, trying with all my might to stifle the sobs that seemed almost to suffocate me.

When, however, we reached the dining-room, and I found myself put inside the door among a crowd of strange voices and faces, my courage failed me again, and I turned round in dismay to look for my faithful Bridget. But she had disappeared, and my face was already puckering up for a fresh burst of tears, when a lady came forward and took my hand, and I heard a kind voice say—

ing,—“Poor little girl, she is frightened. You don’t remember me, little Florence? Come and sit on my knee.”

And I found myself on a comfortable lap, with a kind, motherly arm thrown round me, and in that unassailable position I ventured to raise my eyes and “take stock” of the occupants of the room. I had the more leisure to do this satisfactorily as my kind protector wisely would not allow me to be worried with questions, but leaning back in her chair, continued a low whispered conversation with a gentleman on her left hand. I recognized him at once. He was the village doctor, Mr. Penrhyn, and his grey head and benevolent countenance were connected in my mind with a recent attack of measles, bottles of horrible mixtures, and many childish fits of naughtiness and rebellion.

By the empty fire-place stood another gentleman, with a keen, clever countenance, and a sarcastic, but not unpleasant, expression. I knew him too; he was our family lawyer, and he gave me a kindly nod and smile as our eyes met. In close conversation with him stood a

young man whom I had never seen before. He looked very young, not more than twenty, and was very tall and thin, with weak, unsteady blue eyes and reddish hair. No doubt he regarded me as an infant, too young to pay any attention to what was said, for he scarcely lowered his voice as I entered, though he was talking about me, and I heard every word he said. He was speaking in a sharp, discontented tone, probably only restrained by the presence of strangers from becoming quite passionate.

“It is a monstrous thing, Mr. Clay. My uncle has left everything away from me that he possibly could. I am very little richer by this inheritance except the beggarly title, which I wish I could sell. And it is so absurd. What is that little chit of a girl to do with eight thousand a year? It is unjust, unnatural.”

“Pardon me, Sir Edgar. I can conceive nothing more *natural* than for Sir Henry to leave all his personal property to his only child. Besides, it was hardly-earned money, and he had a right to will it as he thought right.”

“He might have had some consideration for me. Nothing is more despicable than a title without fortune to keep it up.”

“That will not be your situation, Sir Edgar. If you are not extravagant, there is no reason why you should not maintain your position with perfect ease and comfort.”

“I’m sure I don’t know. It is all very provoking and disappointing.”

“You had better take to some profession. It is a grievous thing for a young man to have no particular object or occupation in life. Have you thought of the army?”

But here my attention began to flag, and my eyes wandered to another group, at the end of the room. Two gentlemen were bending over the large writing-table at the far end of the room, opening and shutting drawers, and, did my sight deceive me, or were they actually unsealing and reading the papers and letters contained therein? This was too much for my childish sense of honour and propriety. Quietly sliding from my kind friend’s knee, I walked the whole length of the room alone, and, touching the arm of the tallest of the delinquents, I said, indignantly,

“You must not meddle with my papa’s things.”

He looked down with a smile on his grave face, and began in a puzzled tone,—“My dear little girl—”

“Let me take her back to her aunt,” said the younger man, half-impatiently, and he seized my reluctant hand.

“*Don’t!*” I cried passionately. “You have no business to touch me; and you are a wicked, deceitful man to read papa’s letters because he is not here.”

I think he would have made some hasty answer, but the elder gentleman came forward and said kindly,—“Poor little thing, she does not understand. We are only doing what your dear papa would have wished, my dear, and what is necessary should be done.”

“*Would have wished!*” The words recalled my half-forgotten misery, and the desolating remembrance that I should see that kind father no more. I burst into a flood of subdued, heart-broken tears, which did not cease till the kind lady who had first noticed me came quickly across the room and took me

in her arms again. In that tender, loving embrace I soon ceased to cry, and when I had recovered myself sufficiently to attend to what they were saying around me, Mr. Clay was speaking in a grave, earnest voice.

“We have nearly settled everything now. The only question which remains undecided is, what is to be this little girl’s future home? Mrs. Stuart,” and he turned to the lady who was holding me; “do you know if your sister made any plans, or can you tell us what her wishes were?”

She looked up quickly, and spoke in a surprised, almost indignant tone of voice.

“That question need not be discussed, Mr. Wood. Where should my dear sister’s child find a home but with us?”

“You are prepared to undertake this charge? It will be a heavy and responsible one, especially—” he glanced at me and did not finish the sentence, which was fortunate, as it was doubtless something uncomplimentary to me and my bringing up.

“We are prepared to undertake all the trouble, all the responsibility,” said the kind voice again, and she glanced up at the tall

elderly man whom I had rebuked for his "meddling." "Is it not so, John?"

"Certainly," he replied, warmly. "Dear Laura's child must never leave us."

"If this is really settled, Mr. Stuart, I should like to have a little private conversation with you," said the lawyer, and they retired together to a distant part of the room.

After this my memory becomes confused. I think I must have fallen asleep, for the next thing I remember is being tucked into my little cot by a kind soft hand (not Bridget's), and hearing Mrs. Stuart's voice saying, "Sleep well, my little Florence, you have a journey before you to-morrow. Good-night, my dear, dear little girl."

In order to make the after-events of this story clear to the reader, it is necessary that I should go back a little, and indulge for a page or two in that dullest of all writing—a retrospect of events which passed before the commencement of my history.

The house in which I lived ever since I can remember anything was called Ladyscourt, and was situated in Sussex, at the foot of the

Downs. Not a very romantic part of the country in the eyes of most people, but we loved it dearly. The broad green sunny fields, as yet untouched by cultivation; the long shady lanes, decorated with woodbine and honeysuckle, and over-arched with grand old elms and beeches; and the Downs! miles of breezy, undulating ground, with numberless new and delightful treasures hid in their shadowy mysterious nooks and dells. I have some specimens of the bee-orchis now, which I have kept all these years in remembrance of a happy walk taken with my father in search of this flower, which was reported, and not untruly, to grow near a great chalk-pit in the Downs.

Everything was delightful, in-doors as well as out-doors, in my old home. Ladyscourt was really a fine old place, with a large well-wooded park, and beautiful pleasure-grounds; but I should have loved it if it had been nothing better than a huge barn. What games I used to have along those interminable galleries, and in the large entrance hall, where mamma (who was generally available as a playmate on wet days) used



to chase me round and round, and up and down, till the whole place rang with my shrieks of merry laughter! I had no brothers or sisters, and I never felt the want of them. Oh, how happy it all was, and how soon it came to an end!

My dear mother had been unwell for some days. I remember now my indignant surprise at her refusal to play at ball with me in the dining-room on a very "wet day"; and not long after she took to her bed and never left it again. The same messenger informed my father that he was a widower, and the father of a dead son. He did not long survive the shock. He was nearly thirty years older than my mother, but so young-looking was he for his age, that they had not seemed an ill-matched pair. Now, however, he failed all at once, and ere three months had passed I was an orphan, and desolate. I could not understand the greatness of the misfortune that had fallen upon me, but I knew that a dark cloud had passed over my bright young life, taking away, for the time, all its enjoyment, and I mourned over it bitterly.

My father, Sir Henry Hatherleigh, had few near relations, and his title and the entailed estates went to a young nephew, now Sir Edgar Hatherleigh, whom I have already mentioned in my story. My mother's only sister was Mrs. Stuart; and to her care I was now committed. After all the grief and excitement of the afternoon I have described, I slept heavily, and did not wake till the morning sun was streaming into my dear old nursery, revealing Bridget on her knees in a corner of the room, telling her beads (for she was a Roman Catholic), and praying audibly that—

All the angels might defend,  
And every saint unite to tend,

her dear little lady. I am not quite certain if I have quoted her prayers quite correctly, but they were doggerel rhymes much resembling these, and I had heard them so often before that I had ceased to pay any attention to them, and, jumping out of bed, I threw my arms round my dear old nurse's neck, and would not let her go till she had promised

faithfully “never, never, *never* to leave me.” With many tears, she repeated the words, which set my childish heart at rest; and well and faithfully, in after years, did she redeem her vow.

## CHAPTER II.

## UPROOTING.

The tear on childhood's cheek that flows  
Is like the dew-drop on the rose ;  
When next the summer breeze comes by  
And waves the bush—the flower is dry.

SCOTT.

ONLY one more chapter of childish recollections, dear reader, and then I will pass on to later and more interesting days. Behold me now, seated in my uncle's travelling carriage, trying hard to clear my eyes from the blinding tears, that I might lean out of window and get a last look at the dear old place. I was miserable enough then; but the sorrows of six years old are not inconsolable, and, ere long, I submitted to be kissed and comforted, and, sitting up, I began to look about me, and take interest in the scenes that were flying past the carriage-windows.

Opposite me sat my uncle, Mr. Stuart, whom I was now desired to call Uncle John, and, by his side, Bridget, with several large packages on her lap, her honest eyes full of tears. She did not like to leave the home where she had been an honoured and faithful servant for five-and-twenty years. My uncle and aunt were complete strangers to me: they had been abroad for three years, so, of course, I could have no recollection of them.

My Aunt Edith, as I now called her, was a pretty, fair woman; no longer very young, but with a tall, stately figure; always beautifully dressed, at least, so it appeared to me, who had been accustomed to my own mother's simple attire. A drive of eight miles, a railway journey of one hour and a half, with numerous stoppages and changes, then another brisk drive for about twenty minutes, and we arrived at Dalehurst, in Hampshire, the residence of my uncle and aunt, and my future home.

It was a comfortable-looking, red brick house, not nearly so large as Ladyscourt, but very pretty, with a small, undulating park, watered by a river which shone in the sun like a broad silver ribbon. I was taken at

once upstairs into the school-room, where two girls were sitting at dinner with their French governess, a short, sallow, black-eyed woman, who rose at once, and greeted me with much *empressement*.

The elder of the two children, Laura, was about eleven years old, and had a countenance which struck me as being very heavy and forbidding, though I am told now that she was always considered handsome. But the other, Adelaide, how can I describe the impression she made upon me? Child as I was, I had my own ideas of beauty, as most children have, and they were, of course, diametrically opposed to my own appearance. Being dark myself, I considered that all fair people must be beautiful, and thought "blue eyes and golden hair" the acme of loveliness. Little Adelaide (she was only two years older than myself) was very bright and fair, and sweet-looking, and full of enthusiastic admiration. I looked up in her face and said,—“How lovely you are. You are just like a fairy.” She burst into a merry laugh, and, colouring with pleasure, she kissed me heartily, said I was a “darling,” and we soon became great friends.

Both children seemed on curious terms with their French governess. They called her "Eugénie," and seemed, at times, to treat her with little respect; but I soon found out that she was really mistress, and a grave word from her was enough to check them in their wildest moments. My uncle and aunt had met with her in France, and she had remained with them ever since, partly as governess and partly as companion to my aunt, who placed the utmost confidence in her, and left the management of the children entirely in her hands. She was very kind to me on my first arrival, and praised my dark curls and pretty eyes, till I felt quite ashamed, and crept close to the silent Laura, who was deeply engrosséd in a book all the evening, and scarcely raised her eyes.

Adelaide was full of fun and play, but I was too tired and excited to enjoy it much, and felt it a relief when I was allowed to say good-night, and found myself alone in my pretty little bed-room, with my dear old nurse.

"What do you think of this place, Bridget?" I demanded, while sitting on the edge of the bed, and endeavouring to pull off my little

morocco shoes. "I think I should like it if papa and mamma were here."

"'Tis not so fine a place as Ladyscourt, my dear," replied Bridget, carefully folding up my black crape frock; "but that will be your own to live in when you are grown up, so you need not mind having to stay here for a few years."

"But the people, Bridget; how do you like the people?"

"I don't like that Hugh-Jenny, as they call her," returned Bridget, with some sharpness of tone, giving my frock a vicious little shake before laying it in the drawer. She's a bold, interfering thing. I found her in here just now, meddling with your boxes, and when I spoke to her, she turned round and answered me quite sharp. After all, 'tis only a governess; no better than a servant herself."

"Are governesses like servants?" I asked, meditatively surveying my own fat little foot.

"Yes, deary; only they don't get such good times, nor such high wages."

But ere many days had passed, we had formed a different idea of Eugénie's position, and found that she was by no means to be



treated as a servant, or even as an ordinary governess. In point of fact, she was the great authority in the house.

Aunt Edith could be both energetic and kind on a great occasion; but in her own house, and in every-day life, she was a mere cipher. If I asked her if I might go into the garden, or read any particular book, the answer invariably was,—

“I don’t know, my dear. I am too busy to decide; ask Eugénie.”

It was the same about everything. At first I got on very well with the Frenchwoman, but not for long. Mine was by no means a perfect character. I was passionate, wilful, and intensely proud; but, child as I was, I had a clear notion of honour, and my nature was essentially *true*. Eugénie had no love or veneration for the truth, and one day I discovered accidentally some trifling underhand doings of hers, and proclaimed them, as she vindictively said, “*à haute voix*.” She never really forgave me for this; and from this moment we became real, if not declared enemies, and she did all she could to prejudice my cousin’s mind against me.

I do not know if she had any influence with Laura in this respect, she was always so reserved and silent, that it was difficult to tell, but she certainly had with Adelaide. I felt it hard that my favourite cousin should be taught to dislike me, and my temper was certainly not improved in consequence. But, on the whole, I was not unhappy.

Adelaide would sometimes forget Eugénie's warnings and remonstrances, and indulge in a good game of play; and then I had always good, faithful Bridget to fall back upon. Many a time I have rushed to her room, and hid my head on her lap in a burst of passionate tears, at some unkindness or injustice of Eugénie's; and her conversation on such occasions was always comforting, if not altogether edifying.

"Never mind, my precious one," she would say; "you'll be a deal richer and prettier than any of them one of these days. I'm sure Miss Adelaide's hair is for all the world like tow, and her eyes like pieces of blue kitchen china; and as for that Hugh-Jenny, of all the underhand, sneaking, jealous, impertinent—" Here her stock of epithets usually came to an end, and various pantomimic gestures of anger

and disapproval completed the sentence more effectively than words could have done.

One of my chief delights was in learning to ride. Uncle John bought me a pretty grey pony, and I rode out with him nearly every day—an indulgence which was duly sneered at by Eugénie, and envied by my cousins.

We were not taught much about religion. Aunt Edith used to hear us say our Catechism on Sunday, but I stuck fast at the fourth Commandment, and never got beyond; and there were not the pretty, simple, religious books for children that there are now.

So I grew up like a mountain daisy—as free, as healthy, and almost as untended. I never forgot my father and mother; and, perhaps, that pure, sweet memory was the saving influence of my life, and prevented me from becoming the wild, heartless, selfish girl that my education might otherwise have made me.

As an instance of this, among all my childish naughtinesses, no one had ever been able to accuse me of behaving badly in church. The reason of this was, that I always seemed to carry with me to church the remembrance of a

Sunday afternoon long ago, when I sat by my mother's side in our great old-fashioned pew at Ladyscourt, a tiny child of four years old. Something during the service tickled my childish fancy, and I laughed aloud. I can almost see the loving, reproachful eyes, and hear the grave, kind voice,—“You must not play here, Florence; this is God's House.”

The simple words made a deep impression on me, and I never forgot them. Ah, how often a dying mother's heart has saddened at the thought of how soon she will be separated from her child, and how little chance there is that her loving counsels will be at all remembered or followed! Let them take comfort. Many a word that they thought passed unheeded had taken deep root in a child's heart, and will, perhaps, regulate its conduct in some most important matter long after they are laid in the grave.

I had been about two years in my new home, when one morning, as I was waiting in the drawing-room for my pony to be brought round, my aunt looked up from her writing, and said,—

“A cousin of yours is coming to pay us a

visit next week, dear. Sir Edgar Hatherleigh. You must have heard us speak of him."

"I am very sorry to hear it," I replied, decidedly.

"My dear child! what can you know about him?"

"I remember him quite well, and he is not nice at all. Don't have him here, aunty; *pray* don't."

At that moment my pony was announced to be standing at the door, and my aunt smiled, and let the matter drop. My words naturally seemed to her only the foolish fancy of a wayward child, not worth disputing. Looking back to-day on all that has passed since that morning, I can believe that they were caused by some dim prescience of the evil to come, which should be engendered by that visit. But the spirits of childhood are elastic, and I soon forgot all my fears and forebodings in the keen enjoyment of a long ride through the green Hampshire lanes with my dear uncle.

Three days afterwards, I was looking out of the school-room window on a wet, windy afternoon in July. Adelaide was by my side, and

we were amusing ourselves with counting the drops which were rapidly chasing each other down the narrow pane, when she suddenly exclaimed,—

“There is a carriage coming down the avenue. Look, Florry; who can it be?”

I guessed at once, but did not say anything; and in five minutes the carriage stood before the hall door, and a tall, thin young man sprang out. Leaning far out of the window, I could recognize his pale blue eyes and reddish hair—the same face that I had studied before in the dining-room at Ladyscourt. As he entered the hall, a fierce blast of wind came roaring down the avenue, and seemed to shake the house to its foundation.

That evening we were dressed in our white muslin frocks, and went downstairs to dessert—an unusual proceeding, for, in general, we did not appear till the ladies came up from dinner. Sir Edgar was sitting on the side of the table nearest the fire-place, and, as we three children entered the room, he turned round and shook hands with each of us. Then, retaining my hands in his, he said,—

“This must be my little cousin; I remember

those black eyes. I suppose you have quite forgotten me, Florence?"

"No," I replied; "I remember you very well indeed."

He smiled, and made some foolish remark about being much flattered; and then I would have passed round the table to my aunt's side, but he detained me, and I had to sit by his side during dessert. He piled my plate with sweet things, but I could not touch them, and sat silent and miserable.

It was strange the intense aversion I had for this young man. I can remember that the glance of his light-blue eye seemed to freeze my inmost soul, yet most people would have seen nothing terrifying in his appearance. He was only a tall, plain youth—if anything, rather delicate and effeminate in appearance, with a quiet, self-possessed way of speaking. It is said that we should avoid a man to whom no animal will attach itself; far more should we dread those from whom the mind of an innocent child recoils in instinctive horror.

Perhaps I disliked Sir Edgar the more because he tried hard to make friends with me, constantly trying to make me talk, and

“draw me out,” as he termed it. The day after his arrival I was walking alone in the garden, to gather some strawberries for the early luncheon, when I descried a tall form, in a grey coat, stretched at full length on the grass, under a beech-tree close to the river. It was Sir Edgar; and he perceived me at the same moment, and called to me to come to him. For a wonder, I obeyed, slowly and reluctantly. He tried to talk to me at first of my games and pursuits; but though I was naturally a communicative child, he could only elicit the shortest and most reserved answers. At last he fixed his small light eyes on my face, and said, with a smile,—“You don’t seem to be very fond of me, little one. How have I managed to offend you?”

I said nothing, but cast a longing eye towards the strawberry-beds.

“Don’t go just yet,” said he, taking my hand. “Do you know, little Florence, if it had not been for you, I should have been one of the richest men in Sussex? Won’t you have a little pity for me now?”

“I don’t know what you mean,” said I, fretfully. “I wish you would let me go.”



“The river is very close,” he continued. “I have only to give you one push, one gentle little push, and you would sink down into those green depths, and never be heard of again. Then I should be a rich man. Don’t you wonder I don’t do it?”

He spoke partly in fun, partly with a boyish delight of teasing a little child; but in spite of the bantering tone and smile, something in his face frightened me, and I burst into tears. His tone changed at once.

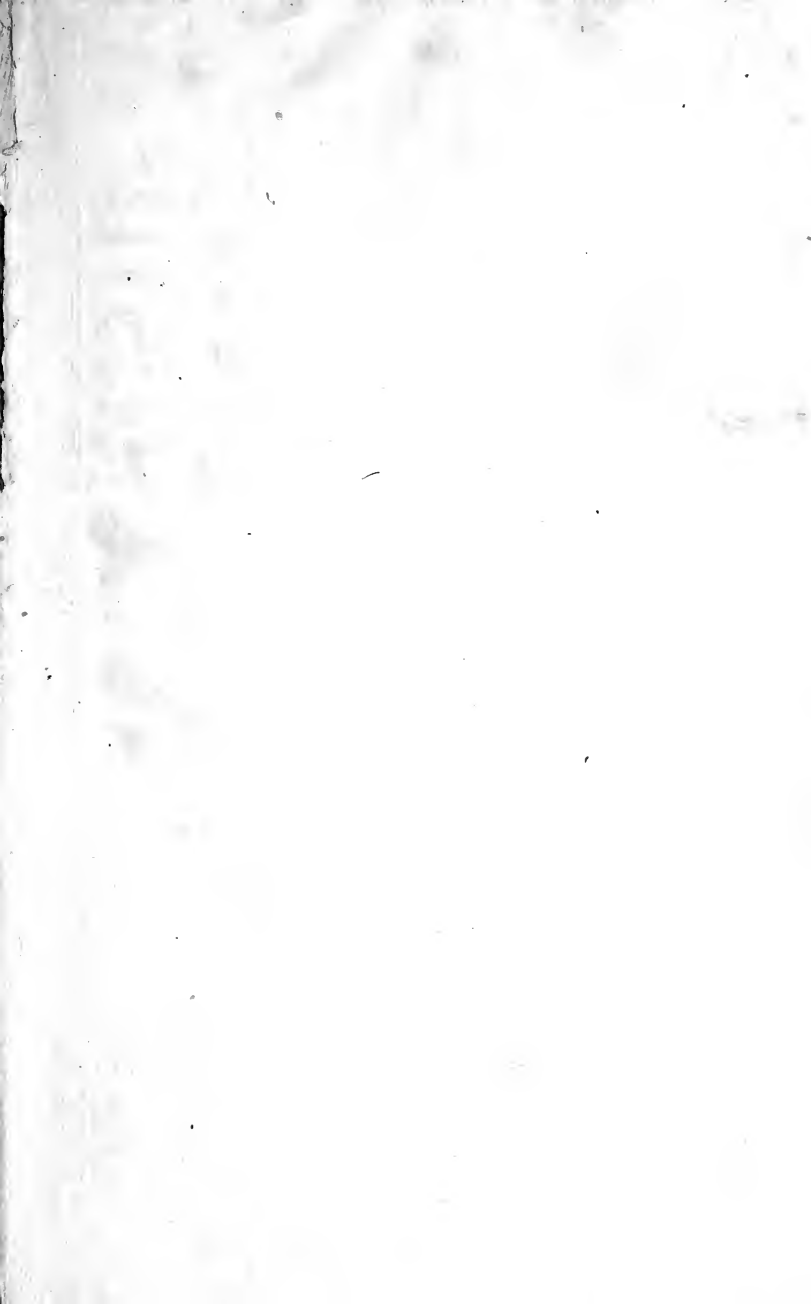
“You little goose!” he laughed, not unkindly. “You know I was only in fun. Why, Florence, you are too big a girl to cry for nothing.”

By a strong effort, I wrenched my hand from his, and fled away across the lawn. I did not feel myself safe till I had joined Laura and Addie in the school-room; and during the rest of Sir Edgar’s visit, I took care never to be found alone. He only stayed one week, and after that I saw him no more for many years.

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